

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Context & Origen

At the conclusion of the second vatican council, many new norms started to be implemented all over the world to help people worship God. Some of these norms included changes to the liturgy. Unfortunately, these new norms were not always observed in their fullness, which led to confusion and the abuse of the liturgy by some. One of these changes was to re-establish the practice of laity distributing Holy Communion. Due to the confusion created in the early 70s, Pope Paul VI promulgated a document called *Fidei Custos* (FC) in which he clarified the role of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Later, Pope John Paul II, together with the *Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments* at the Vatican, wrote another document called *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS). In English it translates to “The Sacrament of Redemption.” In this document, the Church provides further instructions on how to give proper worship to God in the liturgy of the Mass as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

In R.S. we read:

- “Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when:
 1. The Priest and Deacon are lacking
 2. The Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason
 3. When the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.” (R.S. 158)

Emphasis on the name

In this document, emphasis is placed on the name Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) for the following reasons: (R.S. 156)

- **Extraordinary**
 - It fully encompasses the true purpose of the minister
 - The *ordinary* ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishops, priests and deacons
 - This means they are the default, unless any of the three conditions above are present
 - The *extraordinary* ministers of Holy Communion are the commissioned people of God
 - This means they are graciously there, in assistance to the ordinary ministers (i.e. Bishop, priests and deacons)
- **Minister**
 - The person whether lay or ordained commissioned to perform some sacred act on behalf of the Catholic Church
- **Holy Communion**
 - It fully encompasses the dual reality of this sacrament which is both:
 - The Body of Christ
 - The Precious Blood

In practice

If you made it this far congratulations!! In summary, being an EMHC is of great importance. Therefore, thank you for considering this role. An EMHC must be a person of deep faith and great example of a Christian life that radiates to the people they minister. The reason for all these procedures and rules is not to overwhelm you nor to scare you or to just follow them for the sake of following them. They are meant to help us give proper worship to our God with reverence. Hence here are a few practical things:

- **Your role**

- EMHC for the Body of Christ
 - At the chant “Lamb of God” or at the customary time
 - Approach the sanctuary with reverence
 - Line up in the usual manner
 - Wait for the priest or deacon to give you Holy Communion
 - Reverently receive the ciborium with the Eucharist
 - At Holy Communion
 - Place yourselves in the usual manner
 - Slightly lift the host for the faithful to see and say “The Body of Christ”
 - Repeat until done
 - After Holy Communion
 - Arrange amongst yourselves to have two EMHCs, or one depending on the circumstance, to go around the church to give Holy Communion to those unable to move safely
 - Bring the ciborium with the remaining hosts back to the celebrant
 - Be attentive to see if the celebrant needs help with bringing the ciborium back to the tabernacle
 - You may depart to your pews

- EMHC for the Precious Blood
 - At the chant “Lamb of God” or at the customary time
 - Approach the sanctuary with reverence
 - Line up towards the farthest right of the EMHC for the Body of Christ
 - Wait for the priest or deacon to give you Holy Communion
 - Reverently receive the auxiliary chalice with the Precious Blood
 - At Holy Communion
 - Place yourselves in the usual manner
 - The closest you can get to the outer aisle of the church. The aisle closest to the doors
 - Slightly lift the auxiliary chalice for the faithful to see and say “The Blood of Christ”
 - Use the purificator to wipe where the faithful’s lips touched the brim of the chalice
 - Slightly rotate the chalice afterwards
 - Repeat until done
 - After Holy Communion
 - Immediately consume what is left over from the Precious Blood once your communion line is done
 - Immediately means on the same spot
 - Bring the auxiliary chalice back to the celebrant for purification
 - Note:
 - If you are the EMHC for the Precious Blood at a Mass where Fr. Colletti or Fr. Ray are the celebrants, please bring the empty auxiliary chalices back to the credence table
 - Only if there is no deacon with them
 - You may depart to your pews

In Extraordinary Circumstances

- In case the Precious Blood is dropped on the floor or carpet
 - The communion line for that particular EMHC must immediately stop
 - Place the auxiliary chalice in a secure, stable and firm surface
 - The credence table would be a preferred option
 - A purificator should be placed on top of the spilled Precious Blood to absorb
 - The EMHC should thoroughly clean the area
 - Water should be poured to dilute the Precious Blood and clean with the purificator
 - If done in a timely manner, the distribution of the Precious Blood for that line may resume

- In case the Body of Christ is dropped
 - The communion line for that particular EMHC should immediately stop
 - If the faithful has not done so him/herself, reverently pick the Host up
 - Respectfully encourage the faithful to consume Him
 - If unable to consume due to health concerns or any other reasonable concerns
 - Encourage them to give Him back to you
 - Give him or her a new consecrated Host
 - You may now either:
 - Consume the dropped Host
 - Or reverently bring the Host to the ablution bowl
 - Tell the sacristan if you do so
 - If done in a timely manner, the distribution of the Body of Christ for that line may resume
 - Take a mental note as to where the Host was dropped so as to pass a humid purificator on that general area after Mass
 - Either you or the sacristan can do this

- In case someone walks away with the Host
 - Make sure, to the best of your ability, that the faithful did indeed walk away with the Host
 - If so, the communion line for that particular EMHC may shortly stop
 - Reverently approach the faithful and ask them to consume Him or give the Host back to you
 - If they give the Host back to you
 - You may consume Him
 - Or you may reverently bring the Host to the ablution bowl
 - Tell the sacristan if you do so
 - The line for that particular EMHC may resume
- In case someone intincts our Lord in the Precious Blood
 - Do not refuse him or her Holy Communion
 - Just make sure to tell the celebrant after Mass

Helpful Notes:

- Sacristans will take care of properly cleaning the vessels after Mass
- In case that there is only one EMHC for the Precious Blood, please stand in between the two ministers for the Body of Christ during Holy Communion
- You may offer your help if you wish to do so but it is not expected
- At the end of the day these are just guidelines so please do as the celebrant says for that Mass
- Consuming under both species is not a requirement but an invitation. However, if you are an EMHC for the Precious Blood, you should feel comfortable consuming what is left over
- Sign up or ask if help is needed before Mass

Glossary

- EMHC
 - Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion
 - EMBC
 - Provisional language for us which means Extraordinary Minister of the Body of Christ
 - EMPB
 - Provisional language for us which means Extraordinary Minister of the Precious Blood
- R.S.
 - Redemptionis Sacramentum (An official document of the Church)
- Auxiliary Chalice
 - Chalices in addition to the main chalice from which the celebrant consumes from
- Purificator
 - The rectangular piece of cloth used to wipe the Precious Blood of our Lord from the chalice. Also used for purification.
- Purification
 - The reverend act of thoroughly cleaning any particles of Holy Communion from the sacred vessels
- Sanctuary
 - The general area where the Altar is located
- Tabernacle
 - The designated womb (place) in which the Eucharist is placed after Holy Communion
- Credence Table
 - The table on the sanctuary where the gifts of bread and wine are usually placed
- Ablution Bowl
 - The sacred vessel that holds water for the minister to purify his or her fingers after touching what is Holy
 - Usually located next to the tabernacle
- Minister
 - The person whether lay or ordained commissioned to perform some sacred act on behalf of the Catholic Church
- Intinction

- The practice of dipping the Holy Eucharist in the Precious Blood