

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

“No danger of excess”



**A Pastoral Guide for
Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

July 2018



Office of the Bishop Diocese of Santa Rosa

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Dear Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion:

These pages are intended to be a very practical and descriptive tool to assist you to more properly fulfill your liturgical and extra-liturgical duties. It is not feasible to cover every possible situation or circumstance but I hope this document provides sufficient direction to allow you to apply it to almost every instance.

The goal of this booklet and other liturgical directives is to assure that we always approach Sacred things with a clear and considered respect. The terms I like to use are: Reverence, Attention and Devotion. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* speaks of “supreme reverence and adoration”. Pope John Paul II in his Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* notes, “**There can be no danger of excess in our care for this mystery**”. This must be our approach. These are matters first of all of interior disposition but the interior dispositions must be manifested in external ways. I heard somewhere that the holiness of a person is manifested even in how he picks things up and puts them down. How much more for those who are commissioned to handle Sacred things. Dress and demeanor certainly matter and so this instruction touches upon both of these. What we do in regard to the Precious Body and Blood of the Lord and how we do it proclaims very clearly what we believe and what we value.

I hope you find this booklet helpful and even challenging as it gives us an occasion to examine our own actions in the presence of the Lord.

Asking every good grace and blessing of God upon you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ Jesus,

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa
Bishop of Santa Rosa

REMOTE PREPARATION:

There are two types of preparation: Remote and Immediate. By remote preparation we understand two things. First, it entails that general review of our life and lifestyle which calls us to determine whether we are properly disposed to exercise Sacred duties in the Liturgical assembly. There are a variety of Examinations of Conscience which could be used as the basis for this general remote preparation for Ministry.

Second, remote preparation refers to that preparation which ought to begin several hours prior to the exercise of our Ministry. All Catholics are reminded that a part of the remote preparation for Holy Communion includes fasting from all food and drink (including coffee) for at least one hour prior to Holy Communion. In my view, it is preferable to begin this fast one hour before the time when Mass is scheduled to begin. It would certainly not be inappropriate for those who are going to handle the Sacred Species to fast for a longer period of time. This assures that we begin to anticipate the role we will fulfill, the significance of that role and the holiness of the things we will touch. It is also good to anticipate our upcoming duties by trying to do some spiritual and reflective preparation, reading the Scripture of the day, reviewing the Mass prayers, coming to Church earlier so that we may have some prayerful time with our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Also a part of the remote preparation is a review of how we look and how we deport ourselves in the Presence of the Lord. Appearance is very important. Someone wrote me and said, "It is important that the Ministers be neither over nor under dressed." Hard and fast rules are difficult to formulate but subjective tastes vary so greatly that some standards apparently need to be set. It is my intention under **Dress** below to try to formulate such standards.

IMMEDIATE PREPARATION:

The Liturgical books call for a period of silence before the beginning of Mass. Whether other members of the Church observe this silence or not those preparing to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must help set the standard and give witness to the reverence and devotion owed to our Lord in the Tabernacle. As Extraordinary Ministers of His Most Holy Body and Blood it is fitting that you set a standard. When Lay Persons set that standard it is particularly effective. Your active and fruitful participation at Mass, your attentiveness to the prayers and responses, your reverence whether standing or kneeling, your interior devotion and single heartedness each give marvelous witness to our Faith in the Lord's Real Presence. In the older Confirmation epiclesis prayer the Bishop would say: "Fill them with a Spirit of wonder and awe in your Presence!" Fill yourselves with a spirit of wonder and awe in God's Presence and inspire your fellow parishioners to do likewise.

Strive with all your being to recognize and realize the awesome duty which will shortly be entrusted to you. Reflect prayerfully upon the great gift of the Most Holy Eucharist and the extreme privilege entrusted to you as His Sacred Ministers. We cannot afford to grow complacent in our handling of Sacred things. It is the Body of the Lord. It is the Blood of the Lord. Any semblance of casualness or haphazardness must be avoided.

PRACTICAL ISSUES:

DRESS: The first three rules of dress are modesty, modesty, modesty. While I wish I could simply say, modest, clean, neat, and respectful and be confident that we all envision the same standard it is not likely to be the case. Unfortunately these seem to be a very relative terms and need to be more clearly delineated. At the risk of offending I will try to be specific. I believe that anyone coming to Church should always be modestly and appropriately attired unless it is simply not possible to do so. Those who exercise Ministerial roles should strive to set an even higher standard even when not serving in this capacity.

Slacks or dresses should not be too casual, not too tight, not too loose, not too long and not too short. Thus excluded would be shorts of any type for both men and women, dresses above the knee, or slit up the

side significantly above the knee, petal pushers, baggy or ripped jeans, low rise slacks, spandex, and the like. While jeans are not recommended it is recognized that in some communities jeans are common Sunday wear. For Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, even in these rural communities, it is recommended that they dress 'up'.

Shirts or blouses or sweaters must also be modest. T-shirts, tube and tank tops are absolutely inappropriate. Shirts with messages of any kind are discouraged. Bare shoulders for men or women are not commensurate with the dignity of the duty to be undertaken. Sleeveless shirts, blouses or dresses, even in the summertime lack a certain appropriateness and are strongly discouraged. Shirts or blouses should normally be buttoned to the collarbone but need not necessarily be buttoned to the neck. Bare midriff attire is forbidden. Dresses with necklines below the collar bone are forbidden.

AGE: While no firm upper age limit can be given (See **Physical Capability** below) it must be remembered that the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is undertaking a role and duty of tremendous significance. This role is not intended as a 'reward' or even as an 'honor'. It is not intended to be a role which fosters a form of 'inclusivity'. It is an adult role and, as such, is limited to adults. No one under the age of 20 is to be recruited or used as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

PIERCINGS: Hidden piercings while seemingly incompatible with a proper Christian respect for the body are a matter of personal choice. Piercings of the eyebrow, nose, tongue, lip, cheek, and upper ears must be removed in order to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. These are deemed unbecoming to someone designated for this awesome duty. The same can be said of tattoos. (Facial piercings were deemed inappropriate for a gas station attendant at Baker City, Oregon!)

EXCESS: Just as being too casual can be distracting to the Christian faithful and even disrespectful to our Lord so also being too elaborate in dress can likewise be distracting. Excessive worldliness in style, multiple rings on fingers, toe rings, excessive jewelry, spike heels and the like do not give suitable witness to a detachment from the things of this world. These things do not edify the Faithful. Simplicity is a virtue and this does not conflict with modest, clean, neat and respectful.

CLEANLINESS: It is a good idea to be very conscious of the hygienic elements of your Ministry. Clean hands are certainly a must and conscientiousness about this matter is a service to the other Christian Faithful. The practice of parishes providing hand sanitizers is commended. If you have a cold or flu or these are present in your family you may wish to decline serving for fear of infecting someone else. If you are aware of any kind of contagious condition it may be prudent and charitable to excuse yourself as well.

DEMEANOR: The manner in which you enter Church, approach the altar, genuflect and bow testifies to your recognition of the sacredness of the place you are entering and the task you are undertaking. These must be done reverently, devoutly, and attentively. These are times the devil works the hardest to distract us from our appointed duties. Maintaining a reverent silence in the Church, especially if others do not, can give great testimony.

PHYSICAL CAPABILITY: The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion need to be steady of hand and foot. While it is true that anyone can trip and stumble and spill the Sacred Species someone more prone to these accidents may need to excuse themselves. Arthritic conditions may preclude a person, due to this malady, from adequately grasping the Host or purifying the rim of the Chalice after each recipient. Certain palsy like conditions may create an increased and unacceptable danger of spillage. While we are reluctant to exclude any well-disposed person from this precious ministry, the security of the Sacred Species must be our primary concern.

SPECIFIC SITUATIONS:

CATHOLICS ONLY: Those distributing Holy Communion are to administer the Sacrament only to Catholic Faithful. If when stating: ‘The Body of Christ’ or ‘The Blood of Christ’ it becomes doubtful that the recipient has proper knowledge of the Sacrament, the Minister must stop and ask: ‘Are you Catholic’ or ‘Have you made your First Holy Communion’. If it is apparent that the person is confused then simply say, ‘Let me give you a blessing’. Under no circumstance should the Minister instruct the person to open their mouth or extend their hands so that they may receive the Lord whom they apparently do not recognize. The Ministers of the Chalice need to be particularly vigilant because there seems to be less confusion about what to do with the Chalice and often those who show a lack of understanding of how to receive the Host and are given a blessing instead subsequently are presented with the Chalice from which they receive.

USE OF THE PURIFICATOR: Those distributing the Precious Blood use a purificator to wipe the rim of the Chalice after each recipient. The purificator is never to be dipped into the Precious Blood under the mistaken notion that it should be wet with “wine” in order to “sanitize” the rim of the Chalice. Those distributing the Precious Blood should be careful to make sure that the purificator never touches the Precious Blood in the Chalice.

POSTURE OF RECIPIENTS: Those receiving Holy Communion may do so standing or kneeling, in the hand or on the tongue. No one may be denied Holy Communion solely because they wish to receive while kneeling or while standing.

CONSUMING THE HOST: Special care should be taken to ensure that the Host is consumed by the communicant in the presence of the Minister. No one is to go away carrying the Eucharistic Species in his or her hand. It is the Minister’s responsibility to observe any person who has walked away with the Sacred Species and to assure that the Host is properly consumed. If necessary an usher may need to be called to assist the Minister in this duty. In special circumstances some additional pastoral intervention may be required. A good rule of thumb is to delay giving Holy Communion to the next person in line until the previous person has consumed the Host.

COMMUNION PLATE (Paten): The servers are to be properly instructed regarding the practicality of the Communion Paten. Its purpose is to collect, however minimal, any particles of the Sacred Host and on occasion to prevent a dropped Host from reaching the floor. The servers must be trained to hold the paten level. This may be demonstrated by crumbling an unconsecrated Host on the paten during practice. Patens are not necessarily required but, if not used, greater caution in distributing Holy Communion is necessary.

LAMB OF GOD: During the Lamb of God the priest, assisted if necessary by the deacon, fractures the Host or distributes Hosts to various Ciboria. This gesture is not to be unduly prolonged. The utilization of individual Hosts does not detract from the sign of unity spoken of as ‘one bread’. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not to assist in this action which is reserved to priests and deacons.

MULTIPLE CHALICES: The pouring of the Blood of Christ after the consecration from one vessel to another is completely to be avoided, lest anything happen that would be to the detriment of so great a Mystery. Never to be used for containing the Blood of the Lord are flagons, bowls or other vessels that are not fully in accord with the established norms. If one Chalice is not sufficient for Communion to be distributed under both kinds there is no reason why the priest celebrant should not use several Chalices.

Just as it is inappropriate to pour the Precious Blood from a flagon or Chalice into other Chalices so it is inappropriate to do so after Communion prior to the purification of the Chalices.

TAKING COMMUNION vs. RECEIVING COMMUNION: It is not permitted for the faithful to take the Sacred Host or the Chalice by themselves or to hand these from one person to another. Thus those coming forward for Communion seeking to take the Host from the fingers of the Minister are to be instructed to lay their hand flat so that the Host may be placed there.

The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may not take up the Ciborium or the Chalice directly from the altar. It is to be presented to them by the priest or deacon.

NUPTIAL MASS: Newlywed spouses are not to administer Holy Communion to each other at their Nuptial Mass and are not to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion on that occasion.

INTINCTION: Sometimes communicants may wish to receive the Host and bring it to the Chalice for self intinction (dipping) or present it to the Minister of the Chalice for intinction. Neither of these practices is permitted. It is the duty of the Minister of the Chalice to gently inform the communicant.

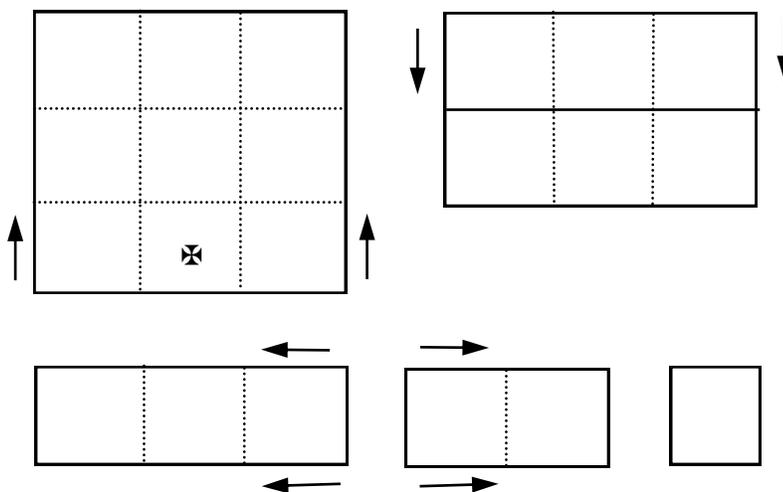
OTHER GIFTS AT COMMUNION: It is forbidden to distribute either unconsecrated hosts or other edible or inedible things during the distribution of Holy Communion, during the celebration of Holy Mass or beforehand after the manner of Communion. Such practices can be a great source of confusion among Christ's faithful concerning the Eucharistic Doctrine of the Church.

BLESSINGS: In those places where it is customary for non-Catholics and the young to enter the Communion procession the Ordinary and the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may not give a blessing using the sign of the cross. They are only to extend a hand to the person and say: "May God bless you" without using the sign of the cross. Since the giving of blessings at the time of Holy Communion is not to be encouraged, special announcements inviting those not properly disposed for Holy Communion to come forward for a blessing are to be avoided.

CORPORALS: A corporal is a specially folded liturgical cloth upon which vessels containing the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of the Lord are ALWAYS placed. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be careful that the sacred vessels in their custody are always placed on a corporal either on the altar or at a place at the credence table even when they are empty but not yet purified.

Proper training should be received concerning the proper use, placement and folding of the corporal. Never 'flick' a corporal open or shake it open in mid-air. Such an action would show a lack of understanding of the purpose of the corporal as well as disrespect for this sacred altar linen. The Corporal should be folded immediately upon the completion of Mass and not left unfolded on the altar.

FOLDING THE CORPORAL: The diagram below is hopefully useful for those who fold and iron the laundered linens. The corporal is never turned upside down in this process.



EXCESS PRECIOUS BLOOD: It is not permitted for the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion on their own to consume the remainder of the Precious Blood after all have received. It is preferable that the last persons receiving be instructed to drink larger portions of the Precious Blood and then for the priest and deacon to consume the balance or for the priest or deacon to present the Chalice to one or two other persons to consume the contents of the Chalice.

PURIFICATION OF THE VESSELS: It is the duty of the priest, deacon and instituted acolyte to perform the initial purification of the Ciboria and Chalices. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may not make this initial purification and a priest or deacon may not delegate them to do so. The purification may be done at the altar or credence table immediately after Communion or at the credence table after Mass. Water can be poured into one vessel and then from vessel to vessel until all have been ‘purified’ and the contents drunk by the priest, deacon or instituted acolyte. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may then finish drying the vessels at the credence table. The subsequent work of further cleansing and sanitizing the vessels is then done by sacristans or those appointed for these duties at a suitable time before their next use.

DROPPED HOST: If a Host is dropped it should be retrieved immediately and placed on the paten or carried to the altar and placed on the paten or at least on the corporal. Sometimes the communicant may consent to receive the dropped Host and this is acceptable provided it is the communicant’s desire. Current rubrics do not call for any special treatment of the area where the Host had fallen.

SPILLED PRECIOUS BLOOD: Should any of the Precious Blood be spilled either on the floor or on you or on another person great care must be exercised to assure proper cleansing of the area. In every case the area should be rinsed with clear water with the rinsing water properly disposed of down the *sacrarium* or lacking a *sacrarium* in an area near the Church where any desecration is unlikely to occur. Such purification water must never be disposed of in the common sewer. Those who may have had the Precious Blood spilled on them are to be instructed to perform this initial rinsing at home prior to regular washing with the purification water poured near their home in an area where any desecration is most unlikely to occur or brought to the Church for proper disposal.

WASHING SACRED LINENS: It is not necessarily the duty of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to take care of sacred linens but those who do so are to be properly instructed. Great care should be exercised in the fulfillment of this duty. It is praiseworthy for the first cleansing to be done by hand in a suitable vessel and that the water from the first washing be poured into the church’s *sacrarium* or into the ground in a suitable place. The second washing can be done in the usual way. Those taking care of the sacred linens need to be properly instructed regarding the traditional and very practical method of folding these linens.

PYXS: Priests, deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not to distribute extra Hosts to those who approach the Communion station requesting additional Hosts even if the communicant is known to the Minister and possesses a suitable pyx. The Communicant is to be instructed to see the Pastor after Mass. The Pastor is to assure that every pyx used in the Parish is designed and suitable for this sacred purpose.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION TO THE HOMEBOUND: Those who bring Holy Communion to the sick and shut-ins must exercise a duty of diligence for the proper care and handling of the Most Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Sacrament is not to be retained in any private home for the sake of convenience in bringing Holy Communion to those in need. The person bringing Holy Communion is to receive the Host(s) from the priest or at least with the pastor’s permission and go directly to the home of the person for whom Holy Communion is intended. Those who receive the Host in conjunction with Holy Mass are likewise to go directly to the person. These Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must not stop and visit others, they may not come to coffee and donuts prior to completing their ministerial duty and, while transporting the Blessed Sacrament, a suitable reverent silence should be observed. This means that use of the radio, except for certain Christian stations, is to be avoided.

INSTRUCTION ON CERTAIN QUESTIONS REGARDING THE COLLABORATION OF THE NON-ORDAINED FAITHFUL IN THE SACRED MINISTRY OF PRIESTS

(From: Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, Practical Provisions)

Article 8 - The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

The non-ordained faithful already collaborate with the sacred ministers in diverse pastoral situations since "This wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery should be increasingly better known and its saving power more fully shared". Such liturgical service is a response to the objective needs of the faithful especially those of the sick and to those liturgical assemblies in which there are particularly large numbers of the faithful who wish to receive Holy Communion.

§ 1. The canonical discipline concerning *extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion* must be correctly applied so as to avoid generating confusion. The same discipline establishes that the ordinary minister of Holy Communion is the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are those instituted as acolytes and the faithful so deputed in accordance with Canon 230, §3.

A non-ordained member of the faithful, in cases of true necessity, may be deputed by the diocesan bishop, using the appropriate form of blessing for these situation, to act as an extraordinary minister to distribute Holy Communion outside of liturgical celebrations *ad actum vel ad tempus* (for individual occasions or temporarily) or for a more stable period. In exceptional cases or in unforeseen circumstances, the priest presiding at the liturgy may authorize such *ad actum*.

§ 2. Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion. They may also exercise this function at Eucharistic celebrations where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion.

This function is *supplementary and extraordinary* and must be exercised in accordance with the norm of law. It is thus useful for the diocesan bishop to issue particular norms concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion which, in complete harmony with the universal law of the Church, should regulate the exercise of this function in his diocese. Such norms should provide, amongst other things, for matters such as the instruction in Eucharistic doctrine of those chosen to be extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the meaning of the service they provide, the rubrics to be observed, the reverence to be shown for such an august Sacrament and instruction concerning the discipline on admission to Holy Communion.

To avoid creating confusion, certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches:

- extraordinary ministers receiving Holy Communion apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants;
- association with the renewal of promises made by priests at the Chrism Mass on Holy Thursday, as well as other categories of faithful who renew religious vows or receive a mandate as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion;
- the habitual use of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass thus arbitrarily extending the concept of "a great number of the faithful".

Material in this guide is derived from:

Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, The General Instruction of the Roman Missal;
Congregation for the Clergy, Instruction *Ecclesiae de mysterio*, Practical Provisions;
John Paul II, Encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*;
Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Instruction on the Eucharist.