

GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION WITHIN MASS

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), the first document promulgated at Vatican II, reaffirmed that Christ is always present in his Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. Christ is present when the Church gathers, prays and sings, in the proclamation of the Word, and in the person of the Minister. Finally, the Council stressed that Christ is present especially under the Eucharistic species. (CSL, no 7)

For the Catholic, the liturgical gathering is of paramount importance. It is fitting then that our liturgical celebrations are described as ‘the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows’. (CSL, no 10)

While the heart of the celebration of Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer, the consummation of the liturgy is found in Holy Communion. In the gathering, in the breaking of the bread, in the eating and drinking the faithful are joined together as members of Christ’s mystical body, sharing the one life of the Spirit. In the great sacrament of the altar they are joined to Christ Jesus and to one another.

It is not surprising then, that in order to promote fuller participation in the Holy Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council called for the faithful present at each Mass to communicate not only by spiritual desire but also by sacramental reception of the Eucharist.

(General Instruction of the Roman Missal 202 [GIRM 2002], no 13)

If a large number of the faithful are present, the presider will frequently need assistance in distributing Communion so that the rite is not unduly long. He will regularly need this assistance when Communion is given under both kinds, the form of Communion that more clearly signifies the Eucharistic banquet. (GIRM 2002, nos.281-282) To that end deacons and concelebrating priests assist as ordinary ministers of Communion.

Instituted acolytes, where they are available, can assist as auxiliary ministers. However Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) will frequently give assistance. (*GIRM 2002, nos. 162 & 284*)

These individuals serve Christ who is present in the assembly by ministering his Body and Blood to their sisters and brothers. They also serve the Body of Christ by taking Communion to those members who, through sickness, old age or other causes, are prevented from taking part in the Mass. In accord with an ancient tradition, it is most appropriate for Communion to be taken directly from the Sunday Eucharist to the sick and the housebound.

Genuine ministry is about humble service. The model for all ministry is Christ the Lord who came 'not to be served, but to serve'. (*Mt 20:28*) His command to 'love one another' (*cf. John 13:34*) permeated his life and ministry. The EMHC must put aside personal agendas and needs, prejudices and judgements, in order to serve the community and give faithful testimony to Christ's presence in the Eucharist.

SELECTION OF CANDIDATES

Those selected to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to be fully initiated members of the community, both men and women, who reflect the cultural diversity of the community and are of sufficient age and maturity. It is expected that, for parish ministry, they will be at least 16 years of age and, for ministry in a secondary school, they will be at least 15 years of age. Since they may also be called to take Communion to the sick and housebound, those persons selected for this ministry should possess the maturity to minister in these sometimes difficult situations.

Criteria are necessary for the selection, formation, and evaluation of ministers. For those who will serve in the public ministry of the Church, faith must be supported by visible signs. To this end, the following personal qualities might be considered when discerning who might serve in this ministry: basic human wholeness, manifestation of the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity), manifestation of the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance), a positive sense of Church, a willingness to be formed in the ministry of the Church, and an abiding

reverence for the presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist and in the assembly of the faithful. Those selected for this ministry must be in good standing with the Church and their way of living harmoniously reflect their love of the Eucharist and their love of the Church.

Ministers who take communion to the sick and housebound must hold the necessary Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate or be accompanied by another person who does hold a DBS certificate.

TRAINING AND ONGOING FORMATION

Preparation for this ministry includes:

- ⊕ Catechesis on ministry, Eucharist, paschal mystery and general guidelines. The Diocesan Liturgy Office will be happy to facilitate this.
- ⊕ Instructions from the EMHC's respective parish concerning local customs and responsibilities, and the opportunity to pray and share with others in the ministry.

Each parish should have a continuous training programme for those who serve in this ministry. That training should include education, formation and support. In addition, opportunities for reflection on the Eucharist and its place in the minister's life should be provided. This should take place at least once a year or perhaps seasonally (e.g. Advent and/or Lent).

LENGTH OF SERVICE

Since ministry is a call both from God and the community in which it is exercised, it is appropriate that choices of ministry and renewal of the term of service be mutually agreed upon by the individual and the parish. Parishes should specify a period for ministers to serve: perhaps two or three years. This will allow both the EMHC and the parish community to benefit from this ministry. It also allows the ministers the opportunity to evaluate their involvement and/or to change to another ministry at the end of their term. Whatever period is agreed, it is advisable for EMHC to be re-commissioned annually, perhaps around the Feast of Corpus Christi. Re-

appointment of EMHC beyond the agreed period is dependent upon parish policy. Initial commissioning comes following a request to and agreement from the bishop. Normally he will send a Letter of Appointment for the individual. Subsequent renewal of commission takes place at the discretion of the parish priest. A Rite of Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers (which can be used for re-commissioning) can be sourced from the Diocesan Liturgy Office.

As with all liturgical ministries, it is best for the individual and the parish if a person serves in only one ministry at any given liturgy. To encourage the involvement of a variety of persons in this ministry, parishes may wish to limit a person's service to one liturgical ministry at any given time.

After preparation for this ministry is completed, formal commissioning of EMHC should take place at a parish Sunday liturgy. An 'Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion' can be found in the *Book of Blessings*, (chapter 63). It is good practice that each parish keep accurate records of each EMHC's ongoing formation and renewal of their term of service.



PROCEDURES

REVERENCE AND ATTIRE

An EMHC should show a reverence for the Eucharist. This reverence is reflected in their demeanour at Mass (full, active and conscious participation in the liturgy – *CSL, no.14*), their attire, and the manner in which they handle the Eucharist. A reverential appearance is in keeping with the minister's role and belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The minister's attire should not detract from this role. EMHC should ensure that their hands are clean.

BEFORE THE LITURGY

EMHC should arrive at their parish well before the liturgy begins. It is appropriate that ministers should take their place seated in the assembly. They do not need to be part of the opening or closing processions. It is a powerful sign of calling to see them coming from the midst of the community and returning to that community having served.

PREPARATIONS

Care should be taken so that enough bread and wine are consecrated for the faithful attending each Mass. Holy Communion should be given from hosts and precious blood consecrated at the same Mass (and, where permitted, from the chalice) and not from hosts reserved in the tabernacle, since the reserved Eucharist is primarily for the sick, the housebound and viaticum. (*GIRM 2002, no. 85, and Eucharisticum Mysterium, no. 5*). GIRM makes no mention of bringing the ciborium with hosts consecrated at an earlier Mass to the altar during the Eucharistic Celebration.

PROCEDURES FOR DISTRIBUTION

According to the liturgical norms the priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon or other concelebrants, breaks the Eucharistic bread as the Lamb of God is sung or recited.

EMHC approach the altar as the priest receives Communion. Local custom determines where the EMHC stand and wait. After the priest has concluded his own Communion he distributes Communion to the assisting deacon, if present. Deacons and EMHC do not receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. Then Communion, under both kinds, is distributed to the EMHC by the priest and assisted by the deacon who ordinarily distributes the Blood of the Lord (NB: If the whole assembly is not being offered the Blood of the Lord, it is not appropriate to offer it to the EMHC only). The practice of EMHC waiting to receive until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law.

As the priest or deacon approaches the minister with the Body or Blood of the Lord, the minister makes a sign of reverence and, after the invitation, 'The Body of Christ' or 'The Blood of Christ' responds with a clear 'Amen'. Next a vessel, containing the Body or Blood of the Lord, is handed by the priest or deacon to each minister and he/she goes to the respective station for the distribution of Communion to the assembly. All who present themselves to the EMHC for Communion should be given Holy Communion. If there is a question of pastoral concern, the EMHC should offer Communion and speak to the priest after Mass.

In the absence of an Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion, when Communion is offered under both kinds, the chalice is always administered

by the EMHC. The chalice is not to be left on the altar for members of the assembly to 'self-communicate' (*GIRM 2002, no 160*). The reception from the chalice by communicants is their personal choice.

GIVING THE HOST

In giving Communion, the EMHC raises the host slightly and says in a clear voice: 'The Body of Christ.' The communicant responds 'Amen.' The minister then gives Communion, respecting the option of the communicant to receive either in the palm of the hand or on the tongue (*GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-287*). The EMHC must ensure that the communicant does actually consume the host and does not attempt to walk away with the host in their hand. This only happens rarely but you should be aware that a communicant might, out of forgetfulness, ignorance or some wrong motive, do this. Should this happen, the EMHC should say, firmly but quietly, 'please consume the host now'.

If a person is unable to receive Communion under the form of bread he/she may choose to receive Communion only under the form of wine – the Blood of Christ.

GIVING THE CHALICE

In administering the chalice, the minister raises the chalice slightly and says in a clear voice while looking at the communicant, 'The Blood of Christ.' The communicant responds, 'Amen'. The EMHC then gives the chalice to the communicant who takes it entirely into his/her hands (when physically able), drinks from it and returns it to the minister. Then the minister wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator, turns the chalice slightly and offers it to the next communicant (*GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-287*). It should be remembered that all movements in the liturgy must be carried out with dignity and reverence. Liturgical movements are never hurried.

INTINCTION

Ministering Holy Communion by intinction is not recommended in the Dioceses of England and Wales. However, should Communion be distributed in this way, the minister of Holy Communion should be accompanied by a server holding a communion plate and another minister holding the chalice.

The minister takes a host, dips it partly into the chalice and, showing it, says, 'The Body and Blood of Christ'. The communicant responds, 'Amen.' He or she receives the host on the tongue from the minister and then withdraws.

When intinction is offered, all members of the congregation should be invited to receive Holy Communion under this form. However individual communicants can choose to receive under the form of Bread alone.

Holy Communion by intinction can only be administered by a minister and may not be self-administered.

BLESSINGS

Should people present themselves to a minister (ordained or lay) for a blessing rather than for Holy Communion, then the blessing should be ministered by laying a hand on the person's head or shoulder and saying words such as 'May the love of God be strong in your heart.' These words should not be accompanied by a sign of the cross.

ACCIDENTS

If an accident occurs...don't panic! You wouldn't be the first and you most probably won't be the last. Keep your cool, remain reverent and simply act with care.

With the host:

If a host falls to the ground during distribution, the minister should pick it up and should consume it straight away before giving the communicant another host.

With the Precious Blood:

The minister might ask the communicant to proceed to another minister of the chalice (if this is possible). The minister should cover what has been spilled with a purificator or towel so that it is absorbed. The area should be washed after Mass and the water poured into a saccharium or simply onto the earth.

PURIFICATION OF SACRED VESSELS

After distribution of Communion any remaining hosts are to be reserved in the tabernacle (or consumed). If there is any remaining Precious Blood, the priest, deacon (or EMHC) consumes what remains.

The chalice and other vessels used for the distribution may be taken to a side table where they are cleansed, or covered and cleansed after Mass by the priest or deacon.

CONCLUSION

'Receiving the Bread of Life, the disciples of Christ ready themselves to undertake with the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit the tasks which await them in their ordinary life. For the faithful who have understood the meaning of what they have done, the Eucharistic celebration does not stop at the church door. Like the first witnesses of the resurrection, Christians who gather each Sunday to experience and proclaim the presence of the Risen Lord are called to evangelise and bear witness in their daily lives.'

(John Paul II, Dies Domini, 45)

