

# **A SCHOOL'S GUIDE TO MINISTERING HOLY COMMUNION**

## **WHAT IS THIS?**

The distribution of the consecrated Bread and Wine to the faithful. What was bread and wine has now become, in truth, Christ's Body and Blood shared with us that we might live in him and he in us.

## **ORDINARY AND EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS**

The ministry of Holy Communion is reserved to those who have been formally called to this ministry.

There are two categories of Ministers of Holy Communion. The first - the Ordinary Ministers - are those called to this ministry by virtue of their ordination. Bishops, priests and deacons fall into this category.

The second are those who are commissioned to exercise the ministry when there are not sufficient ordinary ministers present. These extraordinary ministers are deployed to assist the ordinary ministers, and to avoid the distribution taking an undue amount of time, for example, or the distribution being restricted to one kind, when circumstances would otherwise suggest Communion should be ministered under both kinds.

'Ordinary' and 'Extraordinary' are the Church's technical terms used to describe the circumstances in which the ministry is exercised. 'Ordinary' means what is expected - i.e. that Holy Communion is ministered by ordained ministers. 'Extraordinary' means what is provided in unusual circumstances - i.e. when there are not enough ordained ministers.

When there are regularly insufficient ordinary ministers to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion a school should consider having sufficient extraordinary ministers in place.

## **HOW MANY MINISTERS?**

There are no hard and fast rules. However, having one Minister of the Hosts and two Ministers of the Chalice for every fifty communicants seems about right. More than one for every forty would probably be too many, and fewer than one for every eighty too few.

It is generally the case that when Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds there should be two Ministers of the Chalice for every one Minister of the Hosts.

Whilst in school Masses with children it is not usually considered appropriate to have communion under both kinds, there may be times, e.g. on an inset day, or for a governors' or parents' Mass, when the Mass is specifically for adults and it would, therefore, be appropriate to offer communion under both kinds.

## **WHO CAN BE AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER?**

Such ministers should have been confirmed and be in good standing with the Church. Approval of those proposed for this ministry should be obtained from a priest chaplain or local parish priest, who should also be the commissioning minister (in the absence of a bishop).

Ministers who have been commissioned for service in one parish/chaplaincy properly require a new commissioning for ministry elsewhere.

## **ONE KIND OR TWO KINDS?**

Parish Holy Communion programmes generally prepare children to receive Holy Communion under both kinds. The children should, therefore, have a good understanding of the Eucharist under both its forms, and be familiar with how to receive Holy Communion in both ways, even if communion will only be distributed under one kind.

## **RECEIVING HOLY COMMUNION**

The decision as to whether to receive the Sacred Host on the tongue or in the hand belongs to the individual child or young person (no doubt in consultation with their parents/guardians). Those receiving the Sacred Host should consume it immediately. The response before receiving the Eucharist is 'Amen.'

Where communion is offered under both kinds, the decision as to whether or not to receive from the Chalice also belongs to the individual child or young person (again, no doubt, in consultation with their parents/guardians).

## **WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO DO NOT RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION?**

It is now common for a prayer for these members of the assembly to be offered during the time of the distribution of Holy Communion. This may be done in a number of ways.

When the number of non-communicants is relatively small it is convenient to invite them to come forward with communicants but with their arms crossed before them to indicate they are asking for a 'blessing'.

Rather than a Trinitarian blessing being given (which is properly reserved to a priest, and would be an inappropriate blessing to give, for example, to a Jew or Muslim) it is best for the minister (lay or ordained) to pray words such as 'May the love of God be strong in your heart.'

Where there is a large number of non-communicants – e.g. a class or number of classes of pupils who have not yet prepared for Holy Communion - it is better to offer the prayer for them 'en masse', before or after ministering Holy Communion to the rest of the assembly.

## **COMMUNION FOR COELIACS?**

Communicants with coeliac disease may require a low gluten altar bread to be consecrated for their Communion. Information and guidance can be found at:  
*[liturgyoffice.org.uk/Documents/Coeliacs/index.html](http://liturgyoffice.org.uk/Documents/Coeliacs/index.html)*

## **VESTURE AND STYLE OF DRESS**

Extraordinary Ministers should be neatly and discreetly dressed. It is neither necessary nor desirable that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion wear anything distinctive to indicate the ministry that they exercise. In fact, any semblance of a 'stole' is not to be worn by them since the stole is the symbol of an ordained office of the Church.