

Archdiocese of Los Angeles – Office for Divine Worship

GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

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INTRODUCTION

The Office for Divine Worship has prepared the following guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion serving during Sunday Mass, as well as other Eucharistic celebrations.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide some observations and principles on this important ministry of the Church. These guidelines define the contents of the liturgical law on this matter, the demands of a good Eucharistic liturgy, and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

MINISTRY OF HOLY COMMUNION

1. The administration of Holy Communion during the Mass is truly a ministry. It is the ministry of bringing the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ to the People of God. It is also the ministry of witnessing to faith in the real presence of Christ in the action of sharing in the Eucharistic meal of Christ's sacrifice. The ministry of the Eucharist should, therefore, be treated with utmost dignity and reverence.
 2. In every celebration of the Eucharist there should be enough ministers for Holy Communion so that it can be distributed in an orderly and reverent manner. Bishops, priests, and deacons distribute Holy Communion by virtue of their office as ordinary ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord
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(Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America #27).

When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the Bishop, priest, or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other Bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, “the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., formally instituted acolytes or even some of the faithful who have been commissioned according to the prescribed rite. In case of necessity, the priest may also commission suitable members of the faithful for the occasion” (*Norms #28; General Instruction of the Roman Missal #162, 284*). Instituted acolytes (usually seminarians and candidates for the permanent diaconate) become Extraordinary Ministers through their institution. The role of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion does not replace that of the Ordinary Minister, but supplements it on a provisional basis (*Redemptionis Sacramentum, 151*). That is, when a sufficient number of Ordinary Ministers is present for the distribution of Holy Communion, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not serve.

The faculty is granted to pastors and priests-chaplains to appoint extraordinary ministers of Communion in their parishes or institutions.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Baptized, Confirmed, validly married (if married), and practicing Catholics, fifteen years of age or older, are eligible for this ministry. They should be persons who sincerely try to live the Gospel message in their communal and individual lives. They should faithfully participate in the Sunday Eucharist and with God’s grace strive to live their faith in every aspect of their lives.
2. Candidates for the ministry of Holy Communion should receive sufficient spiritual, theological, and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence before they are commissioned for service in the parish (*Norms for the distribution of HC, 28*).
3. They should demonstrate a deep reverence for and devotion to the Eucharist.
4. They should possess the requisite abilities and temperament to carry out their assigned duties.
5. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion typically serve for two years. Pastors/chaplains may renew terms, if agreeable and in consultation with the minister.
6. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion only serve in the parishes/institutions for which they are commissioned.
7. All new Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned, preferably during a Sunday Mass. The Rite of Commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings, Chapter 63*.
8. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may wear clothing in keeping with their primary role as members of the assembly.
9. Concerning the placement and garb of liturgical ministers, a parish policy should reflect the following values: a) liturgical ministers are first and foremost members of the worshiping assembly and should appear as such; b) flexibility in these areas, in keeping with an attitude of reverence and

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service, is desirable.

10. At least once a year, each community should arrange some program or retreat to renew the faith, prayer and commitment of the present ministers. These meetings/retreats could also include discussions of issues that have arisen in the course of their ministry.
11. All ministers of Communion should be encouraged to attend the Archdiocesan workshops on liturgy sponsored by the Office for Divine Worship as well as relevant workshops offered by other Archdiocesan Offices (e.g., Religious Education Congress, liturgical formation days).

PROCEDURE DURING MASS

3. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion ordinarily take their places within the assembly before the liturgy begins.

All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the way they handle the consecrated bread or wine (*Norms #29*).

4. At the Preparation of the Gifts, the priest prepares the bread and wine on the altar. If the number of communicants is small, the chalice should contain an adequate amount of wine for the Communion of all. If the number is large, one or more containers of wine or chalices (communion cups) filled with wine are placed on the altar (in addition to the celebrant's chalice). The containers (sacred vessels) should be made of precious metal and of a design and quality as befits the celebration of the Eucharist (see GIRM #327-334).

5. At the Sign of Peace, the ministers of communion enter the altar area [*presbyterium*] but remain at a distance from the altar so that the focus of the assembly is on the breaking of the bread by the presider. As soon as the Fraction Rite (Lamb of God) Litany begins, additional chalices may be brought to the altar for filling from the containers. (If there are an exceptionally large number of chalices to be filled, the containers may be brought to the side table where the chalices may be filled by a designated minister). In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, it is permissible, when necessary, for designated ministers to assist in the distribution of the consecrated bread from the one ciborium into additional ciboria and in pouring of the consecrated wine into additional chalices.

This action is usually carried out at the altar, so that the sharing of all from the one cup is signified; in the case of large assemblies, it may be done at the side table within the area around the altar (*presbyterium*) (*Norms #37*).

6. The priest presider receives Communion first. After the priest has received Communion, he distributes Communion under both kinds to the assisting deacon, if present. Then Communion under both kinds may be given to the ministers by the priest, 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 ministers only).**

Neither deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. The practice of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law. (NDRHC, 39; GIRM, 160).

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As the priest or deacon approaches the minister with the Body or Blood of the Lord, the minister bows his or her head as a sign of reverence and responds with a clear “Amen” to the invitation, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ.” 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 (*Norms #38-40*).

7. Since enough bread and wine for each assembly’s Eucharist is brought forward at the time of the Preparation of the Gifts, **the need to go to the tabernacle is and ought to be avoided.**

NB: In preparing the unconsecrated bread before the Liturgy prudence should be exercised to ensure that the number of hosts consecrated corresponds to the number of communicants to be expected at the Liturgy.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* states, “It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that in the instances when it is permitted, they participate in the chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated” (85).

However, if the ministers of the Body of Christ realize that they do not have sufficient hosts for the number of communicants, a minister (e.g., the Master of Ceremonies or one of the Ministers of Communion) should be ready to go to the tabernacle and bring the ciborium (a) to the Ministers of Communion who do not have sufficient hosts.

In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, extraordinary ministers may assist the ordinary ministers in handing the vessels to others for the distribution of Holy Communion.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

8. The Body of Christ (Communion under the form of bread) is administered with the words: “The Body of Christ.” After the communicant has responded “Amen,” the (consecrated) bread/host is placed in the hand or on the tongue according to the manner indicated by the communicant. The communicant may choose whether to receive the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue. (*Norms #41*).

The proper and only permissible form for distributing Holy Communion is to offer the consecrated bread by saying, “The Body of Christ” and to offer the consecrated wine by saying, “The Blood of Christ.” No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. (Cf. *GIRM*, 161; 284-287).

“When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister.... When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood” (*GIRM #160*).

9. The Body of Christ is always ministered to the communicant. Communicants are not permitted to take their own consecrated bread/hosts and communicate themselves.

10. If a host/piece of consecrated bread falls to the ground during distribution, the minister should

pick it up reverently, place it in the ciborium, and consume it after the distribution is over or completely dissolved in water before being poured down the *sacrarium*.

11. If someone who is not receiving Communion comes in the Communion Procession to the minister of the Body of Christ, the minister may offer a simple greeting, e.g., “May Jesus be with you always.” Words or gestures of blessing should be avoided.

12. After the distribution of Communion, the number of hosts remaining are reserved in the tabernacle. Care should be taken with any fragments remaining on the corporal or in the sacred vessels (*Norms #51*).

The ciboria which held the hosts should be placed on a side table or taken into the sacristy. Ordinarily they should be placed on a corporal and suitably covered. Ideally, they are cleansed immediately following the Liturgy by the priest or deacon. However, the ciboria may be cleansed immediately following the distribution of Communion (*GIRM 183*) at the side table.

COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

13. In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Communion under both kinds, the Body and Blood of Christ, is normative on Sundays and holy days – as well as at weekday Masses. In order to ensure that this is done in a reverent and orderly manner, the availability of enough ministers is essential. Also, ongoing catechesis on the theological and liturgical aspects of this practice is important. The freedom of each communicant to choose or not to choose Communion under both kinds should be stated. If a person is unable to receive Communion under the form of bread, he/she may choose to receive Communion under the form of wine – the Blood of Christ (*Norms #24, 25, 46*).

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father’s Kingdom (*GIRM #281*).

So that this “fuller light” may foster the faithful’s greater participation in the mystery, Communion under both kinds is to be desired in all celebrations of the Mass, although this is not possible in all cases. For in this sacred rite “the sign of the Eucharistic meal stands out more explicitly”, and the act of drinking the consecrated wine, the Blood of Christ, strengthens the faith of communicants in the sacrificial nature of the Mass. Communion under both kinds can therefore manifest more fully the nature of the Mass as a sacrifice and as a sacred banquet, ritually expressing that “the sacrifice and the sacred Meal belong to the same mystery, to such an extent that they are linked to one another by a very close theological and sacramental bond” (*Norms #19*).

It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the chalice (*Norms #46*).

14. When the members of the assembly drink from the chalice, ordinarily there should be two ministers of the chalice for each minister with the ciborium; but each community needs to determine what ratio is most suitable. Ministers should stand an appropriate distance from each other to facilitate the Communion procession and not unduly impede the assembly’s easy movement.

MINISTRATION OF THE CHALICE [BLOOD OF CHRIST]

15. The chalice is offered to the communicant with the words, “The Blood of Christ,” to which the communicant responds, “Amen.” No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. (Cf. GIRM, 161; 284-287). Generally, the communicant should hold the chalice firmly in both hands and drink from it. However, in the case of physical disability or weakness, the minister should be ready to assist in holding the chalice.

16. After each person has received the Blood of Christ, the minister should wipe both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator and turn the chalice slightly before repeating the procedure for the next communicant.

17. Any danger of spilling the Precious Blood should be carefully avoided. If, by chance, the consecrated wine should spill, the area should be marked, covered immediately and washed and the water poured into the *sacrarium*.

18. The chalice may never be left on the altar or another place to be picked up by the communicant for self-communication (except in the case of concelebrating bishops or priests), nor may the chalice be passed from one communicant to another (*Norms #44*).

19. Following the distribution of Communion, the ministers of the Eucharist consume the remaining Precious Blood from their chalices at a side table or in the sacristy (except as noted below, #28). The ministers of the Body of Christ or other appropriate people may be asked to assist in the consumption of the Precious Blood if needed. The chalices and other vessels that held the Precious Blood are placed on the side table or taken into the sacristy. Ordinarily, they should be placed on a corporal and suitably covered. Ideally, the designated ministers (deacons) cleanse the chalices and other vessels in the sacristy immediately following the conclusion of the Liturgy. However, all the vessels may be cleansed following the distribution of Communion (*Norms #52-53*).

20. The Precious Blood may not be reserved, except for giving Communion to someone who is sick and who is unable to receive Communion under the form of bread. The Blood of the Lord is kept in a properly covered vessel and is placed in the tabernacle after Communion. The Precious Blood should be carried to the sick in a vessel that is closed in such a way as to eliminate all danger of spilling. If some of the Precious Blood remains after the sick person has received Communion, it should be consumed by the minister, who should also see to it that the vessel is properly purified (*Norms #54*).

21. The reverence due to the Precious Blood of the Lord demands that it be fully consumed after Communion is completed and never be poured into the ground or the *sacrarium* (*Norms #55*).

It should be remembered that all movements in the liturgy must be carried out with dignity and reverence. Liturgical movements are never hurried.

COMMUNION BY INTINCTION

22. Communion by intinction, that is, by dipping the host into the Precious Blood is legally allowed.

However, since it eliminates the communicant's legitimate option to receive Communion in the hand and denies the right of the faithful to receive Communion under the form of bread only, intinction is not recommended.

- 23.** If a community still chooses Communion by intinction, the following should be remembered:
- a. The formula to be used by the minister is: "The Body and Blood of Christ." No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way. (Cf. GIRM, 161; 284-287). After the communicant responds, "Amen," the dipped host is placed on the tongue.
 - b. The communicant is not allowed to dip his/her own host into the cup. It is dipped and administered to the individual by the minister.
 - c. For further information see *Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion under both Kinds* (#48 - 50).

CHILDREN AND COMMUNION FROM THE CHALICE

24. In the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Communion under both kinds is normative at all Eucharistic celebrations and is offered to all who have received their first Communion. Children are to be prepared catechetically and liturgically for the option of Communion under both kinds.

Special care shall be given when children receive Communion from the chalice. Parents should be instructed that Communion under both kinds is an ancient tradition for children old enough to drink from a cup. (*This Holy and Living Sacrifice* #49).

GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERS TO THE SICK

25. Ordinarily each commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may take Communion to the sick. However, there may be certain specifically commissioned persons who are sent by the community to minister to the sick of the parish on a regular basis.

Priests with pastoral responsibilities should see to it that the sick or aged, even though not seriously ill or in danger of death, are given every opportunity to receive the Eucharist frequently, even daily, especially during the Easter Season (*Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* #72).

26. Ideally, ministers to the sick are sent by the parish community each Sunday to take the Eucharist to those who are prevented from being present because of age or illness. This is usually done after the Prayer after Communion. The ministers may be blessed and ritually sent to extend the unity of the Eucharist with those who are sick. The formula for the ritual sending may be in these or similar words:

"My brothers and sisters, you are sent to bring the Word of God and the Bread of Life from this assembly to the sick and shut-in members of our parish family. Go to them with our love and our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Liturgical Life* 1988, Vol. II, No. 4, p. 9).

Ministers may be sent in this manner at weekday Masses also.

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- 27.** The minister to the sick may celebrate the Communion Service in one of two ways: a) in context of a liturgy of the Word; b) or in a brief form for use in more restrictive circumstances (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, chapter 3). It is recommended that whenever possible a group of sick or aged persons be brought together to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word and the Communion Service in a communal manner. If this is impossible, the minister should try to celebrate the Communion Service as fully as possible depending on the condition of the patient.
- 28.** When the Eucharist is brought to the sick it should be carried in a pyx or small closed container. Ideally, a table is to be prepared with a cloth and a lighted candle for the Eucharist. A vessel of holy water may also be available.
- 29.** If the sick person can only receive Eucharist under the form of wine, a container of consecrated wine may be brought from the Sunday or weekday celebration of the Eucharist. It is to be placed in a properly covered container and kept in the tabernacle until the minister can take it to the sick person. If any of the Precious Blood remains after the Communion Service, the minister is to consume what remains and properly purify the vessel.
- 30.** Those who care for the sick or family members may also participate in the Communion Service and receive Communion even if they have already received Communion that day.
- 31.** The pastor or priest-chaplain should see that worthy Eucharistic containers are available for use by Extraordinary Ministers to the sick and homebound. The Host is not to be carried in a handkerchief, envelope or similar unworthy container.
- 32.** It is recommended that Hosts for the sick and homebound be consecrated in the Mass from which they will be taken and in which the Extraordinary Ministers have participated. As they are dismissed from the liturgy, the Extraordinary Ministers should proceed immediately to the home of the sick. Hosts which cannot be distributed immediately and consumed at once by the sick and homebound should be consumed by the minister or returned to the tabernacle immediately after the visit.
- 33.** Special care should be exercised in the choice of Extraordinary Ministers who will bring Holy Communion to the sick. These individuals should be able to minister to the sick in a compassionate, prayerful, and sensitive way. They should possess psychological maturity and the ability to keep confidences, not discussing indiscriminately the condition of patients or their homes.

VIATICUM

- 34.** The norm for the reception of viaticum is within the context of the celebration of Mass with the dying person. However, when this is not possible due to circumstances and/or the condition of the dying person, a minister of Holy Communion may distribute viaticum outside of Mass (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, chapter 5).

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 evangelize and bear witness in their daily lives.”
(*Dies Domini* #45).

Pastoral Response to persons with Celiac Disease

The number of people discovering that they are afflicted with Celiac Disease grows daily. In order to give an adequate pastoral response to these persons it is recommended that those responsible for the pastoral care of the faithful be attentive to the following matters:

Become informed about the nature of the disease <http://celiac.org> ;
<http://old.usccb.org/liturgy/innews/1103.shtml>

Reach out to through bulletin ads or announcements to parishioners who might be affected with the disease.

Advise all staff, most especially, Ministers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to be aware of the issues involved and the sensitivity necessary in responding to this pastoral need

<http://www.catholicceliacs.org>

Develop an appropriate procedure in the parish to allow these people to receive Holy Communion with the minimum amount of risk of cross contamination.

Facilitate the acquisition of low gluten altar breads for use when needed <http://www.benedictinesisters.org>

Look for, “Low Gluten Breads,” at the bottom of the order form. An alternative option for hosts can be found at www.clarissealbano.it

*A suggested procedure might be to have the person put their host in an open pyx and place it on the altar before Mass. Care should be taken that no one touches it. At the agreed upon moment in the rite (usually before the rest of the assembly receives communion) the person should come forward to receive the host. The priest or designated minister should pour the host from the pyx into the hands of the person receiving it being very careful not to touch it.

Ongoing Formation for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Ministers should gather regularly, at least annually, at their parish to further their spiritual, theological, and liturgical formation.

Ministers are encouraged to participate in weekday Mass, Eucharistic adoration, and retreats, as well as practice Lectio Divina, and spiritual reading, etc.

Ministers should also be familiar with the following documents:

Sacrosanctum Concilium, The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, December 4, 1963.

Mysterium Fidei, Encyclical on the Holy Eucharist by Paul VI, September 3, 1965

Ecclesia de Eucharistia, Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist in its Relationship to the Church by John Paul II, April 17, 2003

Sacramentum Caritatis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Eucharist by Benedict XVI, February 22, 2007.

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The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist: Basic Questions and Answers, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 2001.