

DIOCESE OF GREENSBURG NORMS AND PROCEDURES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

In his Pastoral Letter, “The Transmission of Faith in the Present Culture”, Bishop Lawrence E. Brandt reminds the faithful of the importance and centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states, “The Eucharist makes the Church” (CCC 1396). No other activity in which we participate as Catholics surpasses the salvific value of the Sunday Eucharist. All parish programs, activities and events should flow from this weekly gathering of the People of God. We must recognize that there is no more important commitment than this. No secular activity, including sporting or recreational events, should take priority over the weekly obligation to participate in the Sunday Eucharist. When we share in the Sunday Eucharist, we are nourished and strengthened by the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. This nourishment assists us both as individuals and as a people sent forth by God to build up his Kingdom in the world in which we live.

In light of the centrality of the Sunday Eucharist in the life of the Church, it is incumbent upon every parish to insure that Sunday Eucharist reflects the highest standards of good liturgy. This would entail an examination and possible adaptation of elements of liturgy that include: presiding, preaching, functions of liturgical ministers, music, and environment and art. Since formation in our faith revolves around the Sunday Eucharist, it is essential that we model in our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations, the same level of excellence that we desire in our Faith Formation programs. Indeed, the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist is the ultimate experience of faith formation.

The Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are bishops, priests and deacons. If not enough ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are available, lay persons may be delegated by the bishop to fulfill this ministry if necessary and are known as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness of advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.²⁵⁹ This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.(RS 158)

Those chosen as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must be fully initiated in the Roman Catholic Church, be Catholics in good standing who live their lives according to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and should normally be at least 16 years of age. They should be persons who are striving to live the Gospel message in their daily lives. “*In this ministry, they*

must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; they must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love.”(Book of Blessings # 1875) They should also participate actively in the life of the local parish or community. In each parish or community, the decision to permit persons to exercise this ministry is to be made by the pastor, administrator, or chaplain on the basis of pastoral need.

Names of candidates must be submitted in writing to the bishop in order to receive the commission (*mandatum*) to exercise this ministry. Extraordinary Ministers will be commissioned for a specified length of time and place. It may be revoked for serious reason and is not transferable to another diocese or another parish.

The competent Authority is bound to select lay faithful of sound doctrine and exemplary moral life. Catholics who do not live worthy lives or who do not enjoy good reputations or whose family situations do not conform to the teaching of the Church may not be admitted to the exercise of such functions. In addition, those chosen should possess that level of formation necessary for the discharge of the responsibilities entrusted to them. In accordance with the norms of particular law, they should perfect their knowledge particularly by attending, in so far as possible, those formation courses organized for them by the competent ecclesiastical Authority in the particular Churches. Great care must be exercised so that these courses conform absolutely to the teaching of the ecclesiastical magisterium and they be imbued with a true spirituality. (*Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest.*” Pope John Paul II, 1997.)

1. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to receive proper formation before they begin to exercise their ministry. This formation should include an instruction on the theology of the Eucharist, on the celebration of Sunday Eucharist, and on the procedure for distributing Holy Communion in the local parish or community. If Extraordinary Ministers are to take communion to the sick, their formation should

also include a discussion on the theology and practice of pastoral care for the sick, and on the procedure of distributing communion outside of Mass.

2. The decision about vesture for ministers is to be made at the local level. If they are to vest, the appropriate vesture is the alb. (*GIRM 119c, 339*)
 - a. No person performing a public function in the Church in a liturgical or other setting is to carry, wear, or use political emblems, badges or other materials in support of any political candidate or any political party particularly not during an election campaign.

3. It is not normative practice for Extraordinary Ministers to be seated in the sanctuary. If it is necessary for ministers to be seated in the sanctuary, care should be taken not to clutter the space with excess furnishings. (*GIRM 310*)
 - a. Extraordinary Ministers are reminded to fast from all food and drink except water for at least one hour before the reception of Holy Communion.

4. Extraordinary Ministers may assist with the distribution of the Eucharist within Mass, may take communion to the sick, and may distribute Holy Communion outside of Mass, each according to the prescribed rite. They may also assist in the distribution of ashes on Ash Wednesday, after receiving appropriate instruction.

5. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, like all liturgical ministers, should function in only one ministry during a particular celebration.

6. Ministers should take an active part in the celebration of Mass, joining with the assembly in the prayers, songs, and acclamations.

7. Newly designated ministers must be commissioned at a Sunday Mass.
 Extraordinary Ministers whose commission is being renewed may participate in the rite. The **Order for Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion** (*Book of Blessings*, nos.1871-1881) should be used for this commissioning.

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1. During the sign of peace, the ministers move from their pews and enter the sanctuary. They do not approach the altar until the priest receives Holy Communion*. When necessary, the priest goes to the tabernacle if it is in the sanctuary for the ciborium and places it on the altar with the other vessels. In those places where the tabernacle is situated outside of the sanctuary, one of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion can be designated to go to the tabernacle and bring the ciborium to the altar.

**Note that there is a distinction between the sanctuary and altar.*

In those places where the physical setting is small and the pews are very close to the altar, the ministers enter and approach the altar while the priest receives Holy Communion.

They receive Communion from the priest who is assisted by the Deacon. (The practice of waiting to receive the Eucharist until after the distribution is not in accord with liturgical law.) Upon completion of their reception of the Eucharist, they receive the vessel containing either species of the Eucharist from the hands of the celebrant.

Where there is a large number of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (six or more) the following option may be used. The priest communicates to two ministers the Consecrated Host and the Cup. When that is completed, the priest presents to one of these ministers the ciborium/plate and to the other minister the Cup. They then, in turn, communicate to the other ministers. When each minister has received from both Host and Cup, each minister moves to the priest who presents one of the vessels to the minister. That minister then goes to his or her station and begins distribution.

(Guidelines and Clarifications for the Diocese of Greensburg on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 2002)

2. When distributing the Body of Christ, the minister raises the consecrated host and says, "The Body of Christ." No other words should be added. After the communicant responds, "Amen," the minister places the consecrated host on the tongue or in the hand of the communicant as (s)he so indicates. Receiving on the tongue or in the hand is always the choice of the communicant.

3. When distributing the Blood of Christ, the minister raises the chalice and says, "The Blood of Christ." No other words should be added. After the communicant responds "Amen," the minister presents the cup to the communicant who takes it, drinks from it, and hands it back to the minister, the minister then wipes the lip of the chalice, turns the chalice slightly and presents it to the next communicant. The cup should not be passed from one communicant to another, nor should the communicant dip the consecrated host into the consecrated wine in order to avoid drinking from the cup.

4. After the distribution of Communion, whatever remains of the Body and Blood of Christ is taken to the altar where it is consumed by the priest and the deacon, and when necessary, by the other ministers. If not consumed, the Eucharistic bread is reposed in the tabernacle by the priest or deacon if the tabernacle is inside the sanctuary. If the tabernacle is outside the sanctuary, one of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion can be designated to return the ciborium to the tabernacle.

5. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the purification of vessels is to be accomplished in the following fashion:

"The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, insofar as possible at the credence table. The purification of the chalice is done with water alone or with wine and water, which is then drunk by whoever does the purification." (*GIRM 279, RS 119*)

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may not assist in the purification of vessels. When needed, the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may assist with the washing of the sacred vessels after Mass.

6. Extraordinary Ministers who take communion to the sick are to carry the consecrated hosts in a pyx. When the ministers take communion to the sick as an extension of the Eucharistic celebration, they may come to the altar to receive the pyx with the consecrated hosts after the Prayer after Communion, or they may wait until after Mass to receive the pyx. Under no circumstance may an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion reserve the Blessed Sacrament in a private home or place outside a church even for a short time. Any remaining hosts and/or particles should be consumed by the

Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion immediately. The pyx should be purified in the usual way in the absence of a priest.

7. When the Extraordinary Ministers who take communion to the sick are sent forth as part of the dismissal rite, the event should be kept short and the words kept to a minimum. For example, in handing the pyx to the special ministers, the presider might say: “Go forth in the peace of Christ, and take the Body of Christ to our brothers and sisters. Share with them the Word of God, and assure them of our prayers.” These ministers should take communion to the homebound directly after Mass.

Diocese of Greensburg

Commission for Worship, December 2009