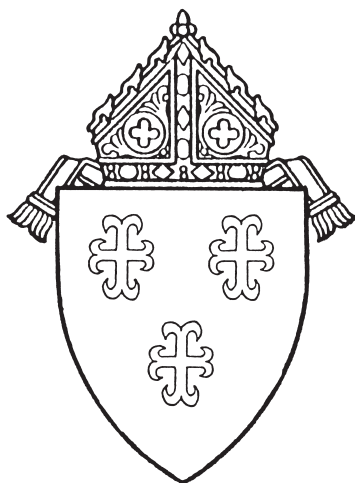


**Guidelines for the  
Extraordinary Minister  
of Holy Communion  
(Revised November 2009)**



**Roman Catholic  
Diocese of Providence**



## I. INTRODUCTION

*“The most venerable Sacrament is the blessed Eucharist, in which Christ the Lord Himself is contained, offered and received, and by which the Church continually lives and grows. The Eucharistic Sacrifice, the memorial of the death and resurrection of the Lord ... is the summit and the source of all worship and Christian life. By means of it the unity of God’s people is signified and brought about, and the building up of the Body of Christ is perfected.”*  
(Code of Canon Law, c. 897)

*“The celebration of the Mass, as the action of Christ and of the Church, is the center of the whole Christian life for the universal as well as the particular Church, and also for the individual faithful, who are involved in differing ways according to the diversity of orders, ministries, and active participation. In this way the Christian people . . . manifests its coherent and hierarchical ordering.”*  
(Redemptionis Sacramentum, n. 36)

The ordinary minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest, or deacon (c. 910, §1).<sup>1</sup> However, other members of the faithful, known as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, may be commissioned to assist – as needed – with the distribution of the Sacrament. That is, when the needs of the Church require it, and when (ordinary) ministers are lacking (c. 230, §3).

Within Mass, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may distribute Holy Communion when there are insufficient ordained ministers capable of administering the Sacrament, in order to provide a timely and reverent distribution of Holy Communion.<sup>2</sup>

Outside of Mass, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may also assist parish priests and deacons in the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.

## II. GENERAL NORMS

These guidelines for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion serving in the Diocese of Providence become effective on January 1, 2010, replacing those issued in August 1997. The new norms reflect changes in both the Church's universal law concerning the Eucharist, and in particular law for the dioceses of the United States. As such, they must be interpreted in harmony with these texts. <sup>3</sup>

Whether within or outside Mass, the extraordinary minister's role is specific -- to distribute the Body and Blood of the Lord. Thus, extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is the accurate title for those who serve the Church in this way. References such as "Eucharistic minister" or "special minister of the Eucharist" should cease.

### *Selection of Candidates*

A pastor will recommend the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the Bishop, who alone grants the faculty for the exercise of this ministry.

For the good of their particular institutions, this applies also to parish administrators, priests in team ministry, rectors, and chaplains.

General appeals for volunteers, or parish-wide "recruiting" should be avoided. The pastor must vigilantly avoid the appearance that the ministry is favoritism of any kind, or "reward" for a favor received. Candidates may be men or women, those in consecrated life, or lay people.

### *Criteria*

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must be:

- Roman Catholics whose qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them
- Fully initiated Catholics (i.e., have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist)
- At least 16 years old
- Regular participants in the sacramental life of the Church
- (if married) Within a wedding bond that is recognized (valid) in the Roman Catholic Church

The pastor should inquire about the candidate's qualifications and personal motivation for this ministry.

### ***Nomination and Appointment***

Once the pastor has identified a suitable candidate, he will nominate him/her, in writing, for the Bishop's consideration. Thus, the pastor affirms that the candidate meets the general criteria, and recommends that the Bishop appoint him/her as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. The pastor should submit the nomination form (which may include multiple candidates) to the Office of the Vice Chancellor. Nomination forms are available, by request, from that same office.

The Bishop will then issue the pastor a certificate, appointing the nominee for a renewable, five year term. The pastor should present the certificate to the new extraordinary minister only after training is completed.

### ***Training***

The new extraordinary minister of Holy Communion will then participate in a parish-based formation session, which should include:

- review of these guidelines;
- basic catechesis on the Most Holy Eucharist, the Mass, and the Liturgical Year;
- practical instruction on distribution of Holy Communion – both within and outside Mass;
- proper care of the Body and Blood of the Lord; and,
- overview of the handbook, *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*.

Parish- or deanery-wide retreats, workshops, Eucharistic Adoration, and days of recollection would be commendable contexts for this training.

### ***Commissioning***

It is expected that the pastor will celebrate the "Order for Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers" found in the *Book of Blessings* (Chapter 63).

Since the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is commissioned to serve a particular parish or institution, normally he/she does not exercise this ministry elsewhere.

However, whenever the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion serves in multiple venues (i.e, both in a parish and at a school/hospital), he/she should be nominated, appointed, trained, and commissioned for each institution.

At any time, the pastor or Bishop may terminate the service of an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, who also can resign at any time. If there is ever a change in the good standing of an extraordinary minister in relation to Church law (especially in cases of divorce and then remarriage outside the Church), it is no longer appropriate for that person to serve as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. With clarity and charity, the pastor must firmly address such situations.

### **III. THE MINISTRY WITHIN MASS**

#### ***Decorum and Demeanor***

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should show reverence for the Most Holy Body and Blood of Jesus, especially by full and active participation in the celebration of Mass. He/she should use respectful and precise language when discussing the Holy Eucharist (always avoiding terms such as “bread” or “wine” when referring to the sacred Host or Precious Blood).

Since the extraordinary minister’s mission is to bring others closer to the Eucharistic Lord, casual clothing, immodest dress and distracting jewelry should never be worn. Dignified dress (jackets and ties for men; skirts or suits for ladies) is preferable. The pastor will determine appropriate norms.

#### ***Procedures***

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should arrive well before his/her scheduled Mass. He/she may be part of the entrance and recessional processions, and seated in the sanctuary or in the assembly. Whatever option is used, the extraordinary minister always assumes the postures of the assembly (i.e., standing/kneeling/sitting in unison).

The extraordinary minister should not approach the altar before the priest celebrant has received Holy Communion. If the extraordinary minister is seated in the assembly, he/she would enter the sanctuary only after the priest celebrant has taken from the chalice. The extraordinary minister then would receive Communion from the priest.<sup>5</sup>

He/she may receive under both species, if the pastor feels it is appropriate.

Neither deacons nor lay ministers may receive Holy Communion in the manner of a priest (i.e., “self communication”).

The extraordinary minister should receive Holy Communion before he/she distributes it.<sup>6</sup>

The extraordinary minister is assigned a ciborium or cup that will be used to distribute the Body or Blood of the Lord. The extraordinary minister should not remove any vessel from the altar, but is to receive it from the hands of the priest or deacon.

*“Haste is the death of devotion.”*

-- St. Francis de Sales

When distributing Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister should fulfill his/her privileged duty with reverence, but never hastily.

**For the Body of Christ (Host):** The extraordinary minister will hold the sacred Host before the communicant and say in a clear voice, “The Body of Christ.” It is inappropriate to change this declaration in any way. After the communicant replies “Amen”, the Host is placed on the palm or tongue.

**For the Blood of Christ (Cup):** The extraordinary minister will raise the cup, and say in a clear voice, “The Blood of Christ”, to which the communicant responds, “Amen.” After each communicant receives from the cup, the minister will wipe clean the cup’s rim, using the purificator. Then, before presenting the cup to the next person, he/she will turn it slightly.

Each cup used for distribution shall have a proper minister.

After the distribution of Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister may consume any remnant Precious Blood from the cup of distribution. *It is absolutely forbidden to pour any amount of Precious Blood down the sacrarium or sink.*

The purification of sacred vessels (patens, ciboria, chalices, cups) may be done only by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte, either at the altar or credence table, either within Mass or after its conclusion.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Miscellaneous***

-- Should a sacred Host drop accidentally during the distribution of Holy Communion, either the person who was receiving the Eucharist or the extraordinary minister should pick up the Host and consume it immediately.

-- Should the Precious Blood be spilled accidentally, the area should be covered immediately with a purificator. After Mass, the area should be dabbed dry with another purificator, and then rinsed thoroughly with water, using fresh cloths. Both the purificators and cloths should be rinsed thoroughly in the sacrarium, and then laid out to dry, before being laundered as usual.

-- If an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is uncertain how to address a particular situation, he/she should bring the matter to the attention of the priest.

## **IV. DISTRIBUTION OF HOLY COMMUNION TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND**

*“The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the Eucharistic community. In bringing Communion to them, the (extraordinary) minister of (Holy) Communion represents Christ, and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at the Eucharist.”*

(Pastoral Care of the Sick, #73)

The Church’s history shows that the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may assist in this crucial pastoral duty. Pastors should prudently select candidates, and ensure that they receive additional

preparation for the unique nature of visits to the sick. An individual may be trained and commissioned for only this aspect of the ministry, or may serve within Mass as well.

### ***Procedures***

In ministering to the sick, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should follow exactly the chapters “Visits to the Sick” and “Communion of the Sick” as contained in the handbook, *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*.

Visits should occur immediately after a parish Mass, emphasizing the sign-value linking the Mass and individual.

The following protocol will help minimize disruptive random requests, and enable the priest to better monitor who takes a pyx:

1. The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the sick should bring his/her pyx to the sacristy before Mass.
2. The pyx is placed on the credence table, where the priest or deacon before Mass fills each pyx with the corresponding number of unconsecrated hosts.
3. At the Preparation of the Gifts, the pyx is placed on the altar.
4. At the end of Mass, following the Prayer after Communion, the extraordinary minister will come forward and stand before the altar. The priest will assign the pyx for distribution.

The priest may dismiss the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion using the formula found in the *Book of Blessings* (n. 1871-1873).

Normally, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may not bring the Holy Eucharist to a residence beyond the parish boundaries. Special situations should be discussed with the pastor.

### ***Avoiding Abuses***

The sacred Host is to be securely contained in a pyx, and carried reverently. Never should the pyx be stuffed into a shirt or pants pocket.

While bearing the Holy Eucharist, the extraordinary minister should attempt, as much as possible, to maintain silence. If the extraordinary minister transports the Eucharist in an automobile, it would be inappropriate to turn on the car radio, or to use a cellphone.

*The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound is to take the Holy Eucharist DIRECTLY – without interruption – from church to the house(s) he/she intends to visit. The extraordinary minister’s visit to the home has priority over any other activity.* <sup>8</sup>

Under no circumstances should a pyx containing the Body of the Lord be kept in one’s possession for distribution “later on”, or, kept in a car while the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion completes personal business (i.e., finishes errands, dines out) between home visits.

The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the sick should consume any sacred Host(s) remaining after a visit, or that cannot be distributed that same day. The pyx should then be purified and wiped dry.

Normally, only the priest or deacon may access the tabernacle. Outside of Mass, when the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the sick needs a sacred Host, he/she should notify the pastor in advance, and coordinate a time for the priest to open the tabernacle for this purpose.

Bringing the Precious Blood to the sick is normally not permitted. Exceptional cases should be discussed with the pastor. The Precious Blood is NEVER reserved in the tabernacle.

The extraordinary minister should alert the pastor whenever the sick and homebound request the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick. A parish priest regularly should visit the home, providing that opportunity. <sup>9</sup>

The visit of the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to the sick does not replace the celebration of Mass in nursing homes and hospitals.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Canon 910 reads: “§1. The ordinary minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest, or deacon. §2. The extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is an acolyte or another of Christ’s faithful deputed in accordance with c. 230, §3.” Canon 230, §3 reads: “When the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply certain of their duties. Namely, to exercise the ministry of the Word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer Baptism, and to distribute Holy Communion, according to the prescripts of the law.”

<sup>2</sup> See *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS) (2004), the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments’ instruction on certain matters to be observed or avoided concerning the Most Holy Eucharist: “. . . the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only: when the Priest and Deacon are lacking; when the Priest is prevented by weakness or 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” (n. 158).

<sup>3</sup> For example, universal law on the Eucharist is found in the *Code of Canon Law*, and the 2000 *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*. Particular law for the United States includes the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, which took effect April 7, 2002, replacing *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*.

<sup>4</sup> *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), n. 156.

<sup>5</sup> *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*, n. 162.

<sup>6</sup> *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, n. 38.

<sup>7</sup> In a decree of March 22, 2002 (Prot. 1382/01/L) in virtue of the faculties granted it by the Supreme Pontiff, Pope John Paul II, The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments granted an indult to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops whereby, for “grave pastoral reasons”, the diocesan Bishop may grant to priest celebrants the faculty to permit extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist with the purification of sacred vessels after the distribution of Communion has been completed in the celebration of Mass. In a letter dated October 12, 2006 (Prot. 468/05/L), Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, informed the same Bishops’ Conference that on June 9, 2006, in an audience with the Supreme Pontiff, Pope Benedict XVI, this indult was *not* extended.

<sup>8</sup> *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (RS), n. 133.

<sup>9</sup> See Pope Benedict XVI, post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (March 2007): “In thinking of those who cannot attend places of worship for reasons of health or advanced age, I wish to call the attention of the whole Church community to the pastoral importance of providing spiritual assistance to the sick, both those living at home and those in hospital . . . These brothers and sisters of ours should have the opportunity to receive sacramental Confession frequently. In this way, they can strengthen their relationship with Christ, crucified and risen, and feel fully involved in the Church’s life and mission by the offering of their sufferings in union with our Lord’s sacrifice” (n. 58).

