

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION AT MASS AND IN SERVICE TO THE SICK

In 1969 Pope St. Paul VI issued the instruction *Fidei Custos*, which allows baptized and confirmed members of the faithful to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion in certain pastoral circumstances. This instruction and subsequent documentation, including *Immensae Caritatis* (1973) and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, have resulted in recourse to extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and to the sick as a common pastoral practice in the United States.

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass assist the distribution of Holy Communion when the number of ordinary ministers is insufficient to serve the assembly in a reverent manner. Assigning extraordinary ministers prevents the Communion Rite from becoming excessively long and out of proportion to the rest of the liturgy. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may also be employed to enable reception of Holy Communion under both kinds.

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick or homebound extend the Church's love and concern for the sick and homebound by a personal visit that includes celebration of the Rite of Distributing Holy Communion outside Mass. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick are called upon either when a parish's ordained ministers are not able to attend adequately to the needs of the sick or where priests or deacons are not available in a hospital or religious institution.

In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the policy authorizing the practice of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass was first promulgated on July 27, 1970. The following norms reaffirm that original authorization and provide additional policies for good order and pastoral practice in the Diocese of Grand Rapids. These policies apply to parishes and to all Catholic institutions such as hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and convents.

In the Diocese of Grand Rapids, the ministries of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick are regarded as two distinct ministries. Each ministry presumes a particular formation and requires a separate mandate. However, an individual may be mandated to exercise both ministries.

Selection of Ministers

POLICY 523:

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass or to the sick shall be baptized and confirmed Roman Catholics who are in full communion with the Catholic Church.¹ They shall embody a mature Christian lifestyle of faith and charity, devotion and morality, service and stability, and live in ways that reflect both love for the Eucharist and love for and desire to serve Christ in others. The minimum age for an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is eighteen; high school seniors who have not reached the minimum age may be

¹ Cf. Canon 205.

mandated to serve a Catholic high school or at Masses celebrated specifically for gatherings of youth.

a) Pastors, superiors, and directors of religious institutions charged with the responsibility of selecting extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should invite the collaboration of others who exercise pastoral leadership in the community in the selection of these ministers.

b) The invitation to be an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is to be understood as a call to service. In addition to what is already stated in Policy 523, those selected should be spiritually sound and capable of adhering to all of the community's procedures for extraordinary ministers.

c) A letter of recommendation from an individual's pastor is to be submitted when the individual is being considered for commissioning as an extraordinary minister for a given institution other than the parish.

Preparation and Formation

POLICY 524:

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and to the sick shall receive catechesis and liturgical training at both the diocesan and parish or institutional level. Parishes and institutions will provide extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick with pastoral and liturgical training that is distinct from the formation of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass. All formation shall be completed before ministers receive a formal mandate to exercise their ministry.

a) As the first phase, potential extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion shall receive formation provided by the diocesan Office for Worship. This will be offered jointly for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and to the sick and will focus on elements common to both mandates.

b) After completing diocesan formation, potential ministers must undergo further training, provided by their parish or institution, specific to their desired mandate (at Mass or to the sick) and the customs and procedures observed where they will serve. This will include detailed instruction concerning the order and practice of distributing Holy Communion. Training of extraordinary ministers to the sick will also involve apprenticeship to an experienced minister.

c) Catechesis for this ministry should foster an appreciation for one's baptismal vocation, an understanding of and devotion toward the Eucharist, and a firm grasp of the meaning of this extraordinary ministry.²

² *Immensae Caritatis* I.VI; *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, Practical Provisions, Article 8.

d) Parishes and institutions will provide opportunities for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to receive ongoing formation and spiritual enrichment. This may be accomplished most feasibly and fruitfully in collaboration.

The Mandate and Commissioning

POLICY 525:

Pastors and directors of Catholic institutions shall submit to the diocesan Office for Worship the names of those for whom they request a mandate as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and/or to the sick.

a) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass and/or to the sick are mandated by the diocesan bishop or vicar general for a period of five years. Each extraordinary minister of Holy Communion will receive from the diocese a certificate authorizing his or her ministry for the five-year period.

b) Ministers willing to continue in service beyond the expiration of their mandate may be nominated for renewal by their pastors or directors. Further formation through the Office for Worship is not required for renewal, but continued suitability for ministry should be ensured at the local level either through refresher training or consistent participation in ongoing formation and enrichment. Those nominated will receive from the diocese a certificate authorizing their ministry for a new five-year period.

c) The local community will maintain a register containing the name and most recent date of mandate for each extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at Mass and/or to the sick. An updated register shall be submitted to the diocesan Office for Worship annually following the October Count. The register may be maintained and submitted electronically.

d) By the approval of the pastor, local superior or institution director, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion whose mandate in another diocese has been verified can be accepted for service without receiving training through the Diocese of Grand Rapids, provided they receive training from their parish or institution regarding local norms and procedures. These extraordinary ministers shall be entered in the parish register of ministers with the date of their mandate from the previous diocese. Their mandate must also be renewed every five years.

e) An individual cannot request on his or her own behalf to be mandated. One can only be recommended by the pastor, superior or director of a Catholic institution.

f) In cases of immediate pastoral need, priests with faculties in the Diocese of Grand Rapids may mandate an individual for a particular occasion.³

³ *Immensae Caritatis* I.II.

POLICY 526:

After receiving a mandate from the diocesan bishop or vicar general through the Office for Worship, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass or to the sick shall be commissioned in the local community where they serve.

- a) The bishop delegates pastors and chaplains to commission these ministers, who are called forth from the community.
- b) The rite of commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 63. Those who are mandated may receive their certificates at this rite of commissioning.
- c) Once mandated, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass or to the sick may exercise their ministry anywhere in the Diocese of Grand Rapids provided the local pastor, superior or director of pastoral care does not object.

Service within Mass

POLICY 527:

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass shall serve only when there are insufficient numbers of bishops, priests or deacons present to assist in the distribution of Communion or when the ordinary ministers are prevented from doing so because of, for example, physical disability or participation in some other ministry.⁴

- a) Ordinary ministers of Holy Communion may never automatically or routinely be replaced by extraordinary ministers. Instituted acolytes are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion by virtue of their institution and are called upon to serve before any other extraordinary ministers.
- b) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass shall not be vested in any special garb, but shall dress neatly in a manner befitting the dignity of serving the community at the celebration of the Eucharist. They may wear a special cross or other appropriate emblem.
- c) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion do not participate in the entrance procession.
- d) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion sit in the nave with the assembly, unless the exercise of another liturgical ministry demands otherwise.

POLICY 528:

The priest celebrant shall receive Communion before distributing the Body and Blood of Christ to the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion and the assembly. Extraordinary

⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 88, 151, 157-158; *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, Practical Provisions, Article 8.

ministers of Holy Communion are not to receive Holy Communion in the same manner as concelebrants.⁵

a) The integrity of the Mass's sacrificial action requires the consumption of the Body and Blood by the priest.⁶ Therefore, the priest celebrant must consume the Eucharist before it is distributed to anyone else. The priest celebrant is not to delay his own reception of the Eucharist until after others have received. Distribution to others may commence while concelebrating priests are still receiving.⁷

b) A deacon who assists at the Mass receives the Body and Blood after the priest celebrant has received. The deacon receives the Eucharist from the priest celebrant and then assists the priest in the distribution of the Eucharist to the faithful. If the Eucharist is distributed under both forms, the deacon ministers the chalice.⁸

c) After the priest has consumed the Body and Blood and given Communion to the deacon, if present, the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion receive the Eucharist. They do not self-communicate but receive Holy Communion from another minister.⁹ They may receive Communion at the altar or at a side station. If receiving at the altar they may not approach the altar until the priest celebrant has received¹⁰ and, where the design of the church allows, should also not enter the sanctuary until after the celebrant's Communion. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may receive Communion under both forms when serving at Mass, even if the rest of the assembly is receiving only under one form.¹¹

d) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion receive Communion before they distribute to the rest of the faithful.¹² This helps to signify that those who minister Holy Communion are themselves filled with that same presence of the Lord that they bring to others.

e) "After all eucharistic ministers have received Communion, the bishop or Priest celebrant reverently hands vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the Deacons or extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. The Deacon may assist the Priest in handing the vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion."¹³

POLICY 529:

The proper forms for distributing Holy Communion are those provided by the liturgical books. Ministers of Holy Communion offer the host by saying, "The Body of Christ," and

⁵ NDRHC 38-39; *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, Practical Provisions, Article 8.

⁶ *Mediator Dei* 112.

⁷ GIRM 246; *Ceremonial of Bishops* 164.

⁸ GIRM 182.

⁹ NDRHC 44, 50; cf. *Ecclesiae de Mysterio*, Practical Provisions, Article 8.

¹⁰ GIRM 162.

¹¹ GIRM 283b.

¹² NDRHC 39.

¹³ NDRHC 40; cf. GIRM 162.

offer the chalice by saying, “The Blood of Christ.”¹⁴ The communicant should audibly respond, “Amen,” each time he or she receives. No other words shall be added and the formula shall not be edited.

a) Ministers of Holy Communion are not permitted to address the communicant by name before saying, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ.” Such an address by name would not only be an illicit addition to the prescribed formula. It would also, in those inevitable cases when the name of the communicant is unknown to the minister, obscure the principle that all the faithful are equal in presenting themselves for Communion.

b) Ministers of Holy Communion may not impart special blessings (e.g., for children or non-Catholics) while distributing Communion. All members of the assembly, including those who have not received the Eucharist, are blessed at the end of Mass. When individuals approach with the expectation of a blessing, ministers of Holy Communion should acknowledge their desire by praying, “Receive Jesus in your heart,” without any accompanying gesture.

c) All extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should be prepared and willing to distribute either form of Holy Communion depending on the need.

d) “The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member of the faithful wishes to receive Communion while kneeling.”¹⁵

e) “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.”¹⁶ The custom of substituting a genuflection for a bow of the head is also acceptable, provided this does not disrupt others coming forward to receive. A gesture of reverence is unnecessary when the communicant receives kneeling, for in that case his or her posture itself expresses the prescribed reverence.¹⁷ “When Holy Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.”¹⁸

f) “The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant.”¹⁹ If the communicant receives on the tongue, he or she is to extend the tongue sufficiently so that the minister may easily place the consecrated host on the tongue. If the communicant receives in the hand, he or she is to extend the hands facing upward with one placed under the other so that the minister may reverently place the consecrated host on the palm.

¹⁴ GIRM 161, 286. Should a priest distribute both species by intinction, the proper formula is provided at GIRM 287: “The Body and Blood of Christ.”

¹⁵ GIRM160; cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 91.

¹⁶ GIRM 160.

¹⁷ *Eucharisticum Mysterium* 34.b.

¹⁸ GIRM 160.

¹⁹ GIRM 160.

g) If an individual approaching to receive Holy Communion demonstrates an ignorance of how to receive the Sacrament, the minister should first ascertain whether the individual is Catholic. If yes, the minister may briefly and discreetly instruct the communicant before distributing to him or her. If not, the minister should acknowledge the individual's desire for Communion by saying "Receive Jesus in your heart," as above.

h) Ministers of Holy Communion are responsible for ensuring that communicants consume the host before returning to their seats. Circumstances may require the minister to leave his or her place of distribution to fulfill this responsibility.

i) Only a priest may distribute Communion by intinction.²⁰ Communicants may not receive the host and then use the host for self-intinction (by dipping it in the Precious Blood).²¹ If an individual is sick or has some contagious illness, the person should refrain from drinking from the chalice.

j) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass may not place hosts into a pyx presented to them in the Communion procession. They may distribute in the Communion procession only what will be consumed immediately by the communicant.

k) If a host or any particle of it should fall, it is to be picked up reverently by the minister of Holy Communion. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to place it on the corporal for the attention of the celebrant, who will either consume the host himself or see that it is completely dissolved in water before being poured into the sacrarium. If any of the Precious Blood spills, the area should be washed immediately and the water poured into the sacrarium.²²

l) Whatever Precious Blood may remain after the distribution of Holy Communion is to be consumed immediately at the altar by the priest or deacon, or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may immediately distribute to one another at a designated location apart from the altar.²³ When assisting in this consumption of the Sacrament, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who are not instituted acolytes do not simply consume what remains in their own chalice; instead, they always receive from another minister. If extraordinary ministers cannot consume the Precious Blood that remains in their chalices, they should approach the altar and request assistance from the priest or deacon. The Precious Blood must never be consumed while walking.

m) A small quantity of Precious Blood may be reserved for taking Communion to the sick who cannot take solid food, if this is to take place the same day. The Precious Blood is never reserved for another Mass, nor is it poured into the sacrarium.²⁴

n) If any of the Precious Blood should become contaminated or spoiled, it is to be disposed

²⁰ GIRM 287.

²¹ NDRHC 50.

²² GIRM 280.

²³ GIRM 163, 182, 279, 284; NDRHC 52.

²⁴ NDRHC 54-55.

of reverently. This may be done by mixing it with a large quantity of water (such that the accidents of wine are no longer apparent) and pouring the mixture into the sacrarium. The Precious Blood may *never* be poured directly into the ground or the sacrarium.²⁵

o) Apart from instituted acolytes, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion at Mass may not purify the sacred vessels.²⁶

POLICY 530:

“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.”²⁷

Holy Communion to the Sick

POLICY 531:

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick shall use the rites provided by the Church in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* or *Pastoral Care of the Sick* when ministering to the sick or homebound at home or in a hospital.

a) The parish or Catholic institution sending forth ministers to the sick is responsible for providing appropriate vessels for the Eucharist. Only vessels that fulfill the requirements of GIRM 328-330 may be used to transport Holy Communion to the sick. Pyxes lined with plastic do not meet this standard. The Eucharist is never carried in a handkerchief, envelope, or other profane container.

b) Extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist to the sick should make arrangements with the priest for access to the tabernacle outside of the times of Mass in order to obtain the reserved Eucharist so that it can be taken to the sick when needed. As an alternative, because communal care for the sick “may be clearly demonstrated by taking Communion to them from the community’s Eucharistic celebration,” and most significantly so on the Lord’s day,²⁸ pyxes may be filled and entrusted to extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion during Mass under the following conditions:

1) Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick should approach the sanctuary to receive hosts for the sick after the distribution of Communion to the faithful and before the Prayer after Communion.

2) Ministers who wish to receive hosts for the sick during Mass must make arrangements through parish procedure prior to the liturgy. Such arrangements may be habitual for stably mandated ministers, but parish procedure should allow the

²⁵ NDRHC 55; *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 107.

²⁶ GIRM 279; NDRHC 53. Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Prot. N. 468/05/L.

²⁷ GIRM 85.

²⁸ *Pastoral Care of the Sick* 73.

clergy to maintain up-to-date knowledge of the sick in need of pastoral care and to ensure that only those who have been duly appointed to minister, either stably or for a given occasion, receive custody of the Eucharist.

3) Before granting an individual a mandate to serve *ad actum*, in cases of true necessity, as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion,²⁹ priests are to ascertain that the individual is eligible for ministry (through sacramental initiation, maturity, and manner of life), knows how to show proper reverence for the Eucharist, has a copy of the rite to be used, and understands how to celebrate that rite.

4) Ministers should depart directly to their ministry once Mass has concluded or they have received care of the Sacrament. They may not stop anywhere else before fulfilling their ministry.

c) Ministers must proceed directly to the sick or homebound when carrying the Eucharist and not engage in profane or secular activities at this time.³⁰ The Blessed Sacrament is never reserved in private homes, offices or automobiles nor is it kept for a long time for later distribution to the sick. Reverence for the Eucharist is to be maintained at all times.

d) Those who care for the sick and infirm should be instructed to prepare a table covered with a cloth upon which the Blessed Sacrament will be placed. Lighted candles are prepared (and, where customary, a container of holy water).³¹ A small cross may also be placed on the table, if one is readily available. While this preparation may not be possible in a hospital setting (in particular, candles may not be lit where oxygen is in use), the administration of Holy Communion should not be hurried or mechanical.

e) The sick who are unable to receive the Eucharistic host may receive the Sacrament under the form of the Precious Blood. The Precious Blood, consecrated at the most recent Mass and reserved only for the purpose of Communion for the sick who cannot receive under the form of bread, is carried to them in a secure and worthy vessel provided by the parish or Catholic institution. Any Precious Blood that remains after distributing Communion to the sick under that form should be consumed by the minister.³²

f) Similarly, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick may consume hosts that remain after distribution if it will not be possible to return the hosts to the tabernacle.³³

g) Vessels that have been used to carry Holy Communion to the sick shall be purified after use; extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may purify in this context.³⁴ The sacred vessels are not to be used for any other purpose.

²⁹ *Immensae caritatis* I.II.

³⁰ Cf. canon 935.

³¹ *Pastoral Care of the Sick* 74.

³² NDRHC 54; *HCWEOM* 55.

³³ The rite provides for reception by the minister (*HCWEOM* 33, 47; cf. *Immensae Caritatis* I.I) and the same exceptional permission to consume the Precious Blood would seem to extend to hosts that cannot be reposed.

³⁴ *Pastoral Care of the Sick* 74, 88, 96; *HCWEOM* 55, 62, 77; NDRHC 54.