



EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION IN THE DIOCESE OF SPRINGFIELD

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide governance and regular, licit practice of the role of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. It defines the intention of liturgical law relative to this ministry, the demands of proper liturgical practice and the expectations of the universal and local Church.

The following regulations for extraordinary ministers serving in the Diocese of Springfield reflect universal law of the Latin Church, particular law for Dioceses of the United States of America as well as particular law for this Diocese of Springfield. Therefore, they must be read and interpreted in a way harmonious with these texts.¹

Role of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The ordinary minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest or deacon (see canon 910, §1). However, other members of the faithful, known as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, may be commissioned to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion as needed (see canons 230, §3 and 910, §2).²

Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Mass when there are insufficient ordinary ministers capable of administering the Sacrament, to ensure a timely and reverent distribution of Holy Communion.³

¹ For example, universal law on the Eucharist is found in the *Code of Canon Law* and the 2000 *General Instruction of 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 on April 7, 2002, replacing *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*.

² 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.”

³ See Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, instruction on certain matters to be observed or avoided concerning the Most Holy Eucharist, *Redemptionis sacramentum*, no. 158: “[... T]he 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.”

Outside of Mass, extraordinary ministers may assist priests and deacons in the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. Additionally, if an ordinary minister is not available, an extraordinary minister has the obligation to bring Viaticum to a dying person (canon 911, §2).⁴

Selection and Terms of Extraordinary Ministers

In this diocese, pastors⁵ are granted the habitual faculty to appoint extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion for their respective parishes⁶ and for institutions within their parish boundaries. In addition, any priest celebrant may designate suitable persons to distribute Holy Communion for a specific occasion when the need arises.

The pastor may consult his advisors to ascertain the need for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion; these could help to identify candidates. General calls for volunteers are not to be extended. Moreover, the selection of candidates must not be presented as a “reward” for active involvement nor are they to be chosen for any reason other than their qualification for the ministry.

Once candidates are identified, a personal invitation is extended from the pastor to an appropriate number of qualified individuals. This number is determined by local need; there should not be so many extraordinary ministers that each does not serve at least monthly, nor should there be so few that they are needed at multiple liturgies on a single day.

Extraordinary ministers must be Catholics, whose qualities of Christian life, faith and morals recommend them. In the Diocese of Springfield, they must be fully initiated. That is, they have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist. They must be practicing Catholics whose lives witness to their service. If the extraordinary minister is married, the marriage must be one that is recognized by the Church.

Once chosen, extraordinary ministers are commissioned to serve in a particular parish or institution. This should occur during a Mass in that parish or institution, with the pastor or his delegate utilizing the *Order for Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers* found in the *Book of Blessings*.

Since extraordinary ministers are designated for service to a particular parish or institution, they are not to exercise this ministry elsewhere without the permission of the appropriate pastor.

Service as an extraordinary minister is not intended to be a permanent ministry; therefore, the minister serves at the discretion of the pastor for a period of three years. At the end of this period, mutual discernment takes place between the extraordinary minister and the pastor regarding continuation. This discernment takes into consideration the needs of the parish and the circumstances of the extraordinary minister, including the length of time already served in this ministry. To facilitate this discernment, each parish is to maintain a list of extraordinary ministers, with their date of appointment.

⁴ Canon 911, §2 states: “In the case of necessity or with at least the presumed permission of the pastor, chaplain or superior, who must be notified afterwards, any priest or other minister of Holy Communion must do this.” The permission of the ordinary minister is always presumed in cases of danger of death.

⁵ When the term *pastor* is used in this document, it should be understood to apply to pastors, parish administrators, priests in team ministry and rectors.

⁶ When the word *parish* is used in this document, it should be understood to apply to communities with a rector, shrines and similar worship communities.

It is understood that a pastor or bishop may terminate the service of an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion at any time, and the extraordinary minister may also resign at any time. For example, if there is a change in the good standing of an extraordinary minister in relation to the law of the Church, that person is no longer permitted to serve as an extraordinary minister.

Formation of Extraordinary Ministers

If they have not already done so, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must receive sufficient spiritual, theological and practical preparation to be able to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence. It is the responsibility of the pastor to ensure that this formation is provided. In order to assist pastors wishing to train extraordinary ministers in their own parishes, the Office of Divine Worship can provide a syllabus and bibliography upon request. Additionally, the Diocesan Office of Divine Worship will assist parishes by offering formation programs and by assisting parishes in locating qualified individuals to conduct formative training on the parish level.

Parishes are strongly encouraged to offer opportunities for ongoing spiritual development for extraordinary ministers. The Office of Divine Worship is available to assist with programs of this type, which should include prayer, reflection on the Holy Eucharist and further enrichment.

The Liturgical Presence of Extraordinary Ministers

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion must always show a reverence for the Holy Eucharist, reflected in their full, conscious and active participation at the entire Mass, in their appearance and in the manner in which they handle the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

Extraordinary ministers must dress in a manner consonant with the dignity of the service they offer. In the Diocese of Springfield, secular clothing is required; no other vesture or garment is permitted. However, the practice of having extraordinary ministers wear a pin to designate the role in which they are serving is left to the discretion of the pastor.

Extraordinary ministers must ensure that their hands are clean and must refrain from using strong cologne, aftershave or perfume, out of care for those with allergies.

Procedures for Extraordinary Ministers

Scheduled extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are to arrive well before the Mass at which they are to serve. If the case occurs that sufficient priests and deacons are present for the orderly distribution of the Sacrament at Mass, extraordinary ministers must not be utilized, even if they have been scheduled in advance.

To assure sufficient ministers and orderly distribution, one extraordinary minister may be designated at each Mass as "coordinator." This person ensures that scheduled extraordinary ministers have arrived and notifies the celebrant if additional extraordinary ministers need to be invited from the assembly.

According to the practice of the parish, extraordinary ministers may or may not participate in the entrance and recession with the celebrant. They may either be seated in the assembly or in the sanctuary. The former is preferred if the size of the sanctuary would create awkward crowding and detract from the celebration. Regardless of where they are placed, extraordinary ministers follow the postures of the rest of the worshipping assembly.

If they are not already in the sanctuary, extraordinary ministers enter after the priest has consumed the Blessed Sacrament from the chalice. They should stand on the sides of the altar and not behind the celebrant. This is in order to allow access to the tabernacle and to avoid a possible false image of priestly assistance.

After the priest consumes the Holy Eucharist from the chalice, he distributes Holy Communion to the deacon (if one is present), then to the extraordinary ministers. It is not permitted for the extraordinary ministers to receive Holy Communion after distribution of the Sacrament to the assembly.⁷

When receiving Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister bows his or her head as a sign of reverence before receiving the Blessed Sacrament. After receiving, an extraordinary minister may accept a sacred vessel from the priest and assist him in administering the Sacrament to the other extraordinary ministers. It is not permissible to pass the paten, ciborium or chalice from one extraordinary minister to another.

After all the extraordinary ministers have received Holy Communion, the celebrant hands the vessels containing the Holy Eucharist to the extraordinary ministers for the administration of Holy Communion. Extraordinary ministers do not take the vessels from the altar themselves.

The extraordinary minister holds the Eucharist slightly above the paten or ciborium, looks at the communicant and says in a clear voice, "The Body of Christ," without any change in this wording or mention of the communicant's name. After the communicant has responded "Amen," the Holy Eucharist is placed in the communicant's hand or on the tongue. Should an extraordinary minister believe that a communicant has not consumed the Holy Eucharist, this is to be brought to the attention of the priest celebrating the Mass immediately.

The extraordinary minister who is administering from a chalice holds it up slightly, looks at the communicant and says in a clear voice, "The Blood of Christ," to which the communicant responds, "Amen." Ordinarily, the communicant holds the chalice and drinks from it, but the extraordinary minister needs to be prepared to assist in the case of physical infirmity or weakness. After each communicant receives the Holy Eucharist from the chalice, the extraordinary minister wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator and turn the chalice slightly before presenting it to the next communicant.

The chalice is always ministered to the communicant; it may never be left for self-communication. Moreover, the communicant may not dip the consecrated host into the chalice under any circumstances. Should it become apparent that communicants are receiving the Sacrament in this fashion, the pastor is responsible for ensuring the appropriate catechesis is offered such as in a homily, a bulletin insert or the like, to explain that one receives the fullness of Christ by reception of the consecrated host alone.

The Trinitarian blessing is given to all the faithful at the conclusion of the Mass. Extraordinary ministers are not to bless persons, and/or lay a hand or hands upon them in place of administering the Blessed Sacrament. If an individual, however, comes forward with hands crossed over the chest

⁷ See *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, no. 39: "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."

not intending to receive, a simple “God bless you” is appropriate, with no gesture or sign of the cross. In general, the practice of giving blessings in the course of distributing Holy Communion is discouraged.⁸

Any remaining hosts must be consumed or placed in the tabernacle. Any of the Blessed Sacrament remaining in chalices must be consumed. The Blessed Sacrament may be consumed by the extraordinary minister at the Altar or the credence table, but never while walking back from their station. It is not permitted to pour the Blessed Sacrament from the Chalice down the sacrarium under any circumstances.

The purification of sacred vessels at Mass may be done only by a priest, deacon or instituted acolyte (see *GIRM*, art. 279), at either the altar or the credence table. (See *GIRM*, nos. 182-183.) In the Diocese of Springfield, the sacred vessels are to be purified reverently at the altar, immediately following the conclusion of the congregation’s reception of Holy Communion.

Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

The Holy Eucharist is “strength for those who journey in hope through this life and who desire to dwell with God in the life to come.”⁹ Therefore, pastors are to make every effort to bring this Blessed Sacrament to members of the Church who are unable to join in the celebration of Mass in person due to advanced age or infirmity.¹⁰ Extraordinary ministers of Communion may assist pastors in this duty. However, the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound is a ministry with different concerns from those that arise during Mass. Therefore, extraordinary ministers who will exercise this role must receive preparation and training on the rites in *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rite of Anointing and Viaticum*. They must also fulfill the requirements of the Diocese of Springfield relative to background checks, for their own safety and protection and that of the people whom they serve.

It is desirable that visits to the sick and homebound with Holy Communion occur after a parish Mass so that the link between the community’s celebration and the individual is maintained. Extraordinary ministers may come forward following the Prayer after Communion, at which time they will be given their pyx or ciborium with the Body of Christ and dismissed according to the *Rite of Dismissal for Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion Bringing Holy Communion to the Sick*.¹¹ A simpler or less formal method may be used, as long as reverence and respect for the Holy

⁸ See Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments, Protocol No. 930/08/L.

⁹ See *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, no. 4.

¹⁰ See Pope Benedict XVI, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (March 2007), no. 58: “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 communion 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.”

¹¹ If a parish chooses this option, the extraordinary minister should have placed a pyx or ciborium on the credence table before Mass, containing the number of hosts necessary. These are placed on the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts.

Eucharist and dignity are maintained.

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who minister to the sick are to take the Blessed Sacrament directly from the church, in a pyx or small ciborium, to the person who is to receive Holy Communion. The Sacrament must never be taken home to be distributed later or left in a vehicle. The extraordinary minister must consume any remaining Holy Communion that cannot be distributed that same day. The pyx is then to be purified, either by an ordinary or extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.¹²

Mishaps with the Blessed Sacrament

If a piece of the Blessed Sacrament falls to the ground during the distribution of Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister picks it up and consumes it immediately or, if this cannot be done in a dignified manner, after the distribution of Communion is finished. If retrieval of the Blessed Sacrament is not possible, the extraordinary minister is to alert the priest at once.

If the Precious Blood is spilled, the area is to be covered immediately with a purificator. After Mass, the area is to be cleaned with damp cloths. These cloths are then rinsed thoroughly, with the water used being poured in the sacrarium. (See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, art. 280.)

If an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is unsure how to resolve a particular situation, the matter is to be brought to the attention of the priest as soon as possible.

Exposition and Reposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The Rite of Eucharistic Exposition and Benediction permits the exposition and reposition of the Blessed Sacrament by an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion if an ordinary minister is unable to do so. "Such ministers may open the tabernacle and also, if suitable, place the ciborium on the altar or place the host in the monstrance. At the end of the period of adoration, they may replace the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle. It is not lawful, however, for them to give the blessing with the Sacrament" (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*, 91). While Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who expose or repose the Blessed Sacrament do not wear the liturgical vesture proper to the priest or deacon, they are to dress in a manner befitting the dignity of this ministry.

Rite of Distribution of Holy Communion outside Mass

The Rite of Distributing Holy Communion outside Mass may be used when a priest is not available to celebrate Mass in a parish. When this occurs, the pastor may call a deacon or instituted acolyte to conduct this service. In their absence, an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may also be asked to lead this Rite. In these cases, the norms of the Rite are followed.

¹² For members of the faithful who can only receive the Precious Blood, the extraordinary minister must consult with the pastor so that special arrangements may be made, such as securing an appropriate container.

Questions and Answers Concerning Extraordinary Ministers

Following are answers to only some frequently asked questions. When additional questions arise, these may be referred to the Office of Divine Worship.

1. May an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion go to the tabernacle?

In the celebration of Mass, a priest or deacon goes to the tabernacle. (See *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, art. 163; *Ceremonial of Bishops*, no. 165.) If the clergy present are infirm or disable, temporarily or permanently, or elderly, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may retrieve and replace the Blessed Sacrament as necessary for the distribution of Holy Communion.

When an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion is asked to expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament or lead a service of Holy Communion outside of Mass, he or she may retrieve the Eucharist from the tabernacle. (See *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*, arts. 91; 30).

When bringing Holy Communion to the sick, a priest or other custodian of the key to the tabernacle places the needed number of hosts in a pyx for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. (See *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass*, art. 10.)

2. What is the Eucharistic fast required for a sick person?

The Eucharistic fast for a sick person is fifteen minutes, if possible (*Immensae Caritatis*, III). If, for any reason, this is not possible, no fast is required. The fast of fifteen minutes, if possible, also applies to Roman Catholic family members or health attendants who are properly disposed and who wish to receive Holy Communion with the person to whom the Blessed Sacrament is being brought.

3. Can the Precious Blood be reserved and given to a sick person?

Yes. "Sick people who are unable to receive communion under the form of bread may receive it under the form of wine alone. If the wine is consecrated at a Mass not celebrated in the presence of the sick person, 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 which is closed in such a way as to eliminate all danger of spilling. If some of the Precious Blood remains, it should be consumed by the minister, who should also see to it that the vessel is properly purified" (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, art. 74).

4. What is the proper procedure to follow when a sick person is unable to consume the host?

If a sick person is unable to consume an entire small host, a smaller piece may be given. A glass of water may be provided to assist the sick person in consuming the host.

If the host is rejected, it is to be wrapped in a purificator and brought to the church or chapel from which the extraordinary minister was sent. There, a priest or deacon dissolves the host in a small bowl of water that is placed in the tabernacle. Once dissolved, this water is poured down the sacrarium.

5. Who may purify the communion vessels at Mass?

The most recent legislation states that only priests, deacons and instituted acolytes may purify the sacred vessels.

6. Is it proper for the celebrant to give the host to the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion before his own communion at Mass?

No. extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion receive Holy Communion only after the celebrant has consumed the Holy Eucharist.

7. Is it proper for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to go to the altar and give Communion to themselves?

No. The Holy Eucharist is always ministered to, not picked up and received, by individual communicants (*GIRM*, art. 160).

8. May an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion assist with the breaking of the Eucharistic host?

No. The fraction of the Eucharistic host is performed by a priest, with the assistance of a priest or a deacon, when required (*GIRM*, art. 240).

9. May Holy Communion be given to someone who wishes to kneel?

Yes. While the norm for dioceses of the United States is that Holy Communion is received standing, an individual member of the faithful may receive Holy Communion while kneeling (*GIRM*, art. 160; *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, art. 91).

10. Is it proper for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to go to the Choir with Communion before Mass with the intention of distributing at the choir at the communion time?

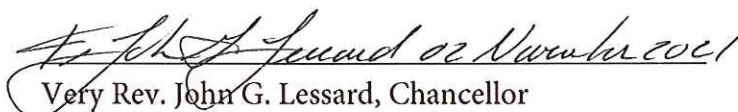
No. The choir receives Holy Communion from an extraordinary minister who goes to the choir at the communion time. Alternatively, choir members may approach the sanctuary after Mass to receive Holy Communion, at the discretion of the pastor and according to the practice of the parish, as long as reverence and dignity are maintained.

11. May Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion sanitize their hands before and after the distribution of Holy Communion?

Diocesan directives are to be followed. These are updated accordingly with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, mandates imposed by the government of the Commonwealth and local health departments. If it is desired that extraordinary ministers sanitize their hands, it should be done in an inconspicuous manner, avoiding show. They should dry their hands prior to distributing Holy Communion so that a smell or taste is not imparted upon the Blessed Sacrament.

These regulations, approved in whole by the Bishop of Springfield, become in force for this Diocese of Springfield on Sunday, 28 November 2021, the First of Advent, for the period *ad experimentum* until Sunday, 05 June 2022, the Solemnity of Pentecost.

From the Chancellor, prepared in cooperation with the Office of Divine Worship.
Approved in whole by the Most Rev. William D. Byrne, Bishop of Springfield,
28 October 2021, the feast of the Holy Apostles Simon and Jude.


Very Rev. John G. Lessard, Chancellor

SEAL

