

**Procedures and Guidelines
for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
and for Communion to the Sick and Homebound**

UPDATED DECEMBER 9, 2023

Thank you for being a liturgical minister at St. Mary+Our Lady of Peace! The witness of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, demonstrated by your reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, is one of the most important means of evangelizing the people.

ROLE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) were first permitted in the United States in 1971. At that time the Congregation of the Sacraments responded to a request of the American bishops to allow laypersons to assist priests in distributing Holy Communion.

In January 1973, Pope Paul VI, in the instruction *Immensae Caritatis*, extended this permission to the universal Church. He wrote: “Present-day conditions demand that greater access to Holy Communion should be made possible so that the faithful, by sharing more fully in the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass, might dedicate themselves more readily and effectively to God and to the good of the Church. First of all, provision must be made lest reception become impossible or difficult owing to a lack of a sufficient number of ministers.”

The institution of this particular ministry responds to the condition in the Church today whereby Catholics are encouraged to share in communion at every Eucharist in which they participate, and under both species, and the large number of persons who are coming forward to partake of the body and blood of Christ.

“It is useful for the diocesan bishop to issue particular norms concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion which, in complete harmony with the universal law of the Church, should regulate the exercise of this function in his diocese” (*Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priests*). These include the following:

- EMHCs may distribute Holy Communion at eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute Holy Communion.
- They may also exercise this function at Eucharistic celebrations where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion.

- EMHCs are also used in order to distribute the Eucharist to the sick or homebound. Any person who regularly takes Holy Communion to the sick is to be trained and commissioned. An individual may be commissioned for only this aspect of the ministry or may perform this service within the Eucharistic assembly. Please see the pastor or deacons for additional information.

REQUIREMENTS FOR ELIGIBILITY

EMHCs must meet the following requirements:

- Be a practicing Catholic, distinguished in their Christian life, faith and morals
- Be at least 16 years of age
- Have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist
- Demonstrate a deep reverence for and devotion of the Holy Eucharist
- If married, the marriage must be a valid Catholic marriage

SPIRITUALITY

EMHCs should strive to live the Catholic Faith in spirit and in truth. Regular Mass attendance, daily prayer (especially meditation on the Scriptures and Eucharistic Adoration), regular Confession, and participation in faith formation and the life of the parish are key. To distribute the Blessed Sacrament, the true presence of Jesus Christ, EMHCs should heed the Lord's invitation to ongoing conversion and friendship with Him.

On the days you are called to ministry, begin the day in prayer and quiet, asking in particular for the gifts of reverence and humility. Avoid anything that would distract from arriving at the church in a calm and collected manner, such as TV, radio, and unnecessary conversations. We cannot give what we do not have, so we rely on the Lord to fill us with his strength.

PROCEDURES

Arrival at Mass

EMHCs should arrive 10-15 minutes before Mass. Please show up if you have been scheduled for a Mass. If you cannot attend on a day that you have been scheduled, it is your responsibility to find a substitute (see Scheduling section below for additional information). Please be respectful of the Eucharist and the ministry; do not wait until the day that you have been scheduled to find a substitute. All liturgical ministers need ample time to prepare to serve in the Eucharistic celebration.

Before Mass

Find the sacristan and assist as needed. Obtain a minister medallion and wear as a distinguishing sign of your service.

It is entirely possible that you may not be needed to distribute communion. Please do not be offended; circumstances of each Mass including the anticipated number of attendees, the ability of the deacons to be at the Mass due to their schedules, the decision to distribute or not to distribute the Precious Blood (which is affected by a number of factors), the presence of other clergy or seminarians at the Mass, weather, and other reasons may mean that more extraordinary ministers have been scheduled than are needed. Please be flexible and bear with these uncontrollable circumstances. Check with the assigned sacristan as to the number of ministers that will be needed.

Enter the sacristy only as necessary and observe proper decorum in the sanctuary and the sacristy, keeping conversation to a minimum and as quiet as possible. Respect the silence of the sanctuary, remembering that noise from the sacristy is inconsiderate to those in prayer. Engage the priest(s), deacon(s) and other servers in conversation only as necessary, respecting their time to prepare for Mass.

During Mass

Extraordinary ministers are ambassadors for our parish and evangelists for the whole Church. Others will watch you as an example for how to receive the Blessed Sacrament, even when you are not serving. Remember to always approach the Sacrament reverently, bow to both the Host and the Precious Blood (even if you do not receive the cup), and to answer with a clear “Amen” when the minister proclaims “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ”.

Extraordinary ministers should sit at a place where they can easily come to the altar for distributing communion without crossing in front of the altar. At both churches, this will usually mean sitting close to the choir areas.

Remain kneeling until the end of the prayer “Lord, I am not worthy...” At the conclusion of this prayer, the priest will consume the Body and Blood of Christ and begin distributing communion to the deacon and altar servers. Extraordinary ministers should proceed to the side of the altar by the ambo to receive communion.

- Make use of the hand sanitizer dispenser as you enter the altar area.
- It is possible that you will be a “provisional” minister, with your service dependent on the number in attendance and the number of ciboriums needed for distribution of Communion. Be prepared should the priest or deacon indicate to you to come forward. You will need to come forward to assist if the priest or deacon brings an extra ciborium to the altar.

- As noted, in some circumstances this uncertainty cannot be avoided; however, proper planning will alleviate this as much as possible. For these reasons it is essential that all volunteers serving at that Mass are identified as far as possible in advance of the Mass, and that all volunteers arrive with plenty of time prior to Mass. The person serving as sacristan shall prepare volunteers as to the expectations of that Mass.

The priest and deacon will hand a ciborium or a cup and purificator to each extraordinary minister. Hold the Precious Body or Blood with extreme reverence and proceed to your station carefully. The minister closest to the congregation with a cup should proceed around the front of the altar before the priest and/or deacon come down the steps in order to move to the far side of the altar before the congregation begins to line up.

Extraordinary ministers should not cross between the altar and the Tabernacle.

Distribution of Holy Communion

Distributing the Host: The minister who distributes the body of Christ to the people should make eye contact with the communicant and elevate the host briefly before the communicant. The minister says, “The Body of Christ” and the communicant responds “Amen.”

- These words are not to be adapted. Do not omit any words (e.g., do not drop “the”) and do not add any words (e.g., the communicant’s name – “Cheryl, the Body of Christ”).
- Place the host in the communicant's hand or on his/her tongue depending upon the preference of the communicant.

Distributing the Precious Blood: The minister of the Precious Blood should make eye contact with the communicant and present the chalice. The minister says, “The Blood of Christ” and the communicant responds “Amen.”

- These words are not to be adapted. Do not omit any words (e.g., do not drop “the”) and do not add any words (e.g., the communicant’s name – “Bobby, the Blood of Christ”).
- Except for a good reason (a parent holding a child, a person who does not have full use of hands), the minister does not attempt to guide the chalice. Simply place the chalice entirely into the hands of the communicant. After the communicant has received, the minister takes the chalice, wipes both sides of the rim with the purificator, turns the chalice slightly, and addresses the next communicant.
- Communicants are not to dip the host into the chalice. This practice – called intinction – is reserved for the priest.

For those not receiving Holy Communion: If an adult or child approaches with their hands crossed over their chest, hold up a consecrated host and offer a brief prayer “Receive the Lord Jesus into your heart”. Do not place your hand on the person or child,

nor extend your hand as if giving a blessing. Do not make the Sign of the Cross as part of the prayer. The giving of a blessing during Mass is reserved to ordained ministers (bishops, priests, deacons) and is not allowed during Communion.

The Body and Blood of Christ are always to be distributed by a minister. The Host and Precious Blood are never left on the altar for communicants to take themselves, nor are they passed from one communicant to another. EMHCs only place a vessel on the altar when invited to do so by the Celebrant of the Mass.

You will receive training on what to do in the event of a drop or a spill of the Blessed Sacrament. Always follow any specific instructions particular to that Mass as given by the clergy present.

If distributing the Precious Blood:

- If after all persons have had the opportunity to come forward, there is Precious Blood remaining in your cup, you may consume the remaining amount if you wish.
- If during distribution your cup is emptied, remain at your station until communion is completed. Drape your purificator over the cup to signify to others that the cup is empty but remember that the cup still contains small amounts of Precious Blood. Do not stuff your purificator into the cup.

After Communion is distributed, wait for the priest (and deacon) to return to the altar, then approach and stand at the side of the altar.

- If you are distributing the Host, do not wipe your hands on your clothing or any other surface before purifying your fingers in the ablution cup. The purpose of the ablution cup is to reverently remove any particles of the Eucharist from your hands. Hand the ciborium to the priest or deacon and wait beside the altar. Turn to the Tabernacle as the Blessed Sacrament is reposed, bowing reverently when the priest/deacon genuflects. Then proceed to the ablution cup, dipping your fingers into the water to remove any particles of the Host, wiping the water off on the purificator.
- If you are distributing the Precious Blood, allow those EMHCs with ciboriums, and the priest/deacon to approach the altar first. Then hand your cup to the priest or deacon. Wait as the priest or deacon prepares the ciborium for reposing, then turn to the Tabernacle as the Blessed Sacrament is reposed, bowing reverently when the priest/deacon genuflects. EMHCs distributing the cup do not need to use the ablution cup.
- After the Blessed Sacrament is reposed in the Tabernacle, all extraordinary ministers proceed to the front of the altar at the bottom of the steps. When all have gathered at the front of the altar, together bow reverently to the altar and return to your seat.

If asked to bring Communion to the homebound, you will be given separate instructions. If someone asks if they may have a consecrated host to take to a homebound person, politely explain that only those authorized by the Pastor are allowed to perform this service.

Thank you for a job well done.

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PROCEDURES

Communion to the Sick and Homebound

It is an honor to take Communion to the Sick and Homebound. They are an integral part of the Body of Christ. Their prayers for all of us are essential for the carrying out of the Mission of the Church.

All those who take Communion to the Sick or Homebound must be EMHCs of this parish, meeting all of the qualifications outlined above, and must be appointed by the Pastor, as approved by the Archdiocese of Denver, to perform this vital service.

In taking Communion to the Sick and Homebound, please be respectful of the Eucharist and the ministry. Every attempt possible should be made to demonstrate your reverence for the reality that you are carrying Jesus – His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity – to those unable to attend Mass.

The purpose of Communion to the Sick and Homebound is to bring them as close to celebration of the Mass as possible, to recognize that they are still a part of our community, the Body of Christ. For this reason, it is especially beneficial if the visit can be done on a Sunday, as the Sick and Homebound are unable to fulfill their Sunday obligation. You should time your visit, if at all possible, immediately following a Mass in which you fully participated. Do not delay after the Mass in going to the person who is to receive Communion.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 1 Cor 11: 23-25

Again, unless special circumstances dictate otherwise, only those who are physically unable to attend a Mass should receive Communion. You should only take as many hosts as needed for those who cannot leave their home or their hospital bed, or for other reasons are not able to make it to Mass. Do not take hosts for your own consumption or for other family members who may be at the home or bedside unless they are also unable to attend Mass for valid reasons.

If you will be taking Communion to the Sick or Homebound following a Mass, make arrangements with the Deacon of the Mass, if present, or the celebrant, for the pyx to be on the altar and a host consecrated specifically for this person. Ask the priest or deacon to retrieve the pyx from the Tabernacle for you immediately following the Mass. Inform the person you are serving of this special way in which they are participating in the Mass that day.

At no time is the extraordinary minister allowed to keep possession of the Eucharist in his or her home or vehicle. After the communion call, any remaining elements of the sacred species are to be immediately returned to the church. The pyx is to be purified, and purificators placed in the proper place for cleansing.

Practical Considerations

- Know that the relationship with the person who is sick is a key factor. The minister brings the comfort and concern of Christ.
- Be aware of feelings that may arise when you enter a person's home or room. If you find it difficult to look at the person because of their physical condition, concentrate on their eyes.
- Take proper time for introduction and personal sharing. Listen attentively so you are aware of what the sick person desires or prefers before beginning the Communion Rite.
- If the person does not wish to share Communion at this time, ask if they would like to pray together or to listen to you read scripture or recite prayers.
- Be aware of making referrals when other services are needed (confessor, counselor, doctor, etc.) Do not try to solve problems but rather help them obtain the proper services.
- If sick person wishes to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation, encourage the family to contact the parish priest or offer to relay the message yourself.
- Keep confidences at all times.

Before Visiting

- Collect information about the person who is sick and other helpful information for your visit to the home or hospital.
- Make an appointment. Even if you have a regularly scheduled time for visiting, call to confirm since the situation may change. The person may not be up for a visit because of various circumstances.
- Spend some time in prayer, either before the Mass you attend or before gathering the host.
- Carry the host in a pyx, with the pyx in a burse around your neck such that from the Tabernacle to the place of the sick, Jesus is carried close to your heart. Have respect and reverence for the presence of Christ.

- When transporting the Eucharist to the sick, ministers should avoid any activity not in keeping with the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament.

As You Begin Your Visit

- Be friendly but not too overpowering. Be careful not to let natural shyness give you the appearance of being remote or distant.
- Share greetings and introductions but try not to delay unnecessarily in beginning the Communion Rite. Ask about the appropriate length of time the person can manage for your visit and any special considerations or conditions.
- You will be a better visitor if you are able to be flexible as interruptions may happen.
- Be confident and personal in your ministry of service but remember that the other person's needs are primary.
- After listening to the conditions and desires of the person who is sick, ask if the person desires communion at this time.
- Be aware of the rules for fasting before receiving Holy Communion. "Those who unexpectedly have the possibility to receive Holy Communion in a hospital, home, or prison with no possibility to fast for one hour are to observe a fifteen-minute fast." (5.4.8.2. *Pastoral Handbook of The Archdiocese of Denver*).

Procedures For The Communion Rite

- Choose a scripture reading from the daily readings, or as suggested in the Communion Rite, as suited to the person. Be aware of the need for short and comforting passages.
- If practical, set a table with candles and a crucifix, but do not insist upon this. Do place the host in the opened pyx in an appropriate place and have a purificator and water available.
- Encourage any family or friends in attendance to participate in the Rite. Ask someone else present to do one of the readings as appropriate.
- Begin with the sign of the cross. It is a common call to prayer. Be a prayerful presence with a purpose.
- Pace the ritual with sensitivity. Be aware of the sick person's ability to follow.
- Give a small portion of the host to a person who has difficulty swallowing. Check with the nurse or doctor in cases of special feeding.
- Wait for the person to swallow the host. Offer water if necessary. Be prepared with a purificator in the event that the person has problems.
- Take time to pray reverently and to be present with the sick person and the family. Be sensitive to the proper time to depart.
- After you have administered Communion, purify the pyx and your hands with water and the purificator, consuming any water that comes in contact with particles from the host.

- After the Communion Rite, share some ideas from the homily (but without appearing to be giving a homily), or share a reflection, such as the reflection in the Magnificat for that day, if appropriate. If the person is interested in the parish, share the bulletin news with them.

Ending the Visit

- Be sensitive to the proper time to depart.
- End with appropriate verbal encouragement such as “Thank-you for allowing me to visit with you today.” “Please pray for our parish that God will be with all of our families and parish leaders.” “Please keep me in your prayers and you will be in mine.” These can be encouraging words, since it helps the person offer service back to you through prayer.
- Share what is appropriate (avoiding details of medical condition, treatment or personal information that should remain confidential) with the parish clergy, staff and others involved in ministry. The sick and homebound should be treated as members of the community and others should be given opportunities to pray for them, to visit them and to serve them.

Appreciation for Your Service

Do not underestimate the congregation's appreciation of the minister who shows reverence for the Eucharist and respect for the Celebrant of the Mass. Your reverence for the Blessed Sacrament and your role in assisting the priest to bring this Sacrament to the people is paramount to helping the faithful understand and appreciate the True Presence and the Sacrifice of the Mass.

GUIDELINES AND TIPS

Dress Code

EHMCs should dress neatly, in a way consonant with the dignity of their role. Good taste and common sense are the best guides in this area. What you wear sends signals to the assembly about how seriously you take your ministry. Dress how you proclaim – with dignity and respect. Never wear anything that will detract from the Eucharist itself. The focus must always be on the Precious Body and Precious Blood, not on the person distributing.

- Please avoid wearing jeans, shorts, sportswear, sandals, shoes with loud heels, and distracting patterns and colors.
- Men are encouraged to wear dress slacks and blazer/suit jacket.

Body Language

The moment you step forward you are sending signals to the congregation. Are you reverent in how you handle the ciborium or cup? Do you sound sincere when you proclaim, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ”? Or do you act as if the task is routine or mundane? These signals come from how you walk, how you carry the Host or Precious Blood, and what you wear. Those who focus their attention on the presence of Jesus will point others to that presence.

Walk at a reverent pace, slower than usual, carrying the ciborium or cup in the manner that you carry something very precious. Hold the ciborium/cup slightly elevated and slightly away from your body. Make turns carefully, looking before you move, and take your time on steps or around obstacles, so as to minimize any chance of accident.

SCHEDULING

Preferences and Contact Information

- Keep your contact information up to date in Ministry Pro using the “Profile” tab.
- Use the “Profile” tab to indicate your preferred Mass time(s) and any dates you are ***unavailable***. ***Do not*** list the dates unavailable in the “Notes” section.
- Two weeks prior to the release of a new schedule, you will receive an email reminding you to update your Profile, including any **unavailable** dates. Schedules will be generated for two months at a time. You will be scheduled based on your indicated availability and your preferred Mass times and locations.
- Once the schedule is posted, you will receive an email informing you of your scheduled ministry times.
- Indicating your availability is an important step toward reducing the number of unfilled assignments. By keeping your Profile up to date, you help to avoid scheduling issues. Your cooperation in ensuring the proper fulfillment of the liturgical ministries is critical and much appreciated.

Reminders

- Volunteers receive an e-mail reminder ***five days*** in advance of their scheduled Mass.
- Volunteers receive an e-mail that lists “available positions this week” on ***Wednesday***. You will receive this email if there are openings at your preferred Mass time(s) and if you have not listed the date(s) as unavailable. Volunteers also can check the full schedule to sign up for any openings.

Requests for Substitutes

- Requests for substitutes should be made as far in advance of the Mass as possible.
- If your *request for a substitute is not answered*: You are responsible for filling your assigned role. Keep track of when you request a substitute and make sure someone accepts your request. If no one accepts your request or if it is a last-minute need, make an attempt to contact other volunteers using the information in the “Roster” tab on Ministry Pro.
- If the request is left unfilled, it is left up to others at that Mass to fill your assignment. This adds added pressure to the already busy moments prior to Mass. Please assist the priest, the deacons and the other volunteers by making every effort to fill your assignment.

Help with Ministry Pro

There is a Ministry Pro tutorial video available through the “Help” tab. If after watching the video, you still have questions, contact Denise Cook at dcook1205@gmail.com.