

## **Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC) performs a great service to the Church, by assisting in distributing Holy Communion to God’s people on those occasions where there is an insufficient number of Priests and Deacons to distribute Holy Communion to the people present at the Mass. It is an honor and a privilege to serve the Church in this capacity, and of course, requires careful preparation on the part of the extraordinary minister.

In each parish that makes use of extraordinary ministers, training and preparation is either done by the pastor, or by an individual that he designates for that task. It is the purpose of this document to assist those individuals who train extraordinary ministers by providing some insight on the theological principles behind the Eucharist and the role of the EMHC, the teaching and discipline of the Universal Church on that subject, the local norms for the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, and some suggestions that may prove useful in their service to the Church.

This document, however, does not exhaust any of these topics, and, of course, the individual charged with preparing extraordinary ministers will want to familiarize himself or herself in greater depth with these topics, especially through study and the cultivation of a strong personal devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist.

If any questions arise about the content of this manual or about situations that are not covered by this manual, contact Fr. Paul White, the Director of Liturgy, at [whitep@ptdiocese.org](mailto:whitep@ptdiocese.org), of 850-435-3511.

## **I. The Minister of Holy Communion**

The document Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America defines the minister of Holy Communion.

By virtue of his sacred ordination, the bishop or priest offers the sacrifice in the person of Christ, the Head of the Church. He receives gifts of bread and wine from the faithful, offers the sacrifice to God, and returns to them the very Body and Blood of Christ, as from the hands of Christ himself. Thus bishops and priests are considered the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion. In addition the deacon who assists the bishop or priest in distributing Communion is an ordinary minister of Holy Communion. When the Eucharist is distributed under both forms, "the deacon ministers the chalice."

In every celebration of the Eucharist there should be a sufficient number of ministers for Holy Communion so that it can be distributed in an orderly and reverent manner. Bishops, priests, and deacons distribute Holy Communion by virtue of their office as ordinary ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

## **II. What is an Extraordinary Minister?**

When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, "the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., formally instituted acolytes or even some of the faithful who have been commissioned according to the prescribed rite. In case of necessity, the priest may also commission suitable members of the faithful for the occasion."<sup>2</sup>

In short, an EMHC<sup>3</sup> is a lay person or religious who has been deputed by the bishop for a period of time, or by a Priest for a single occasion, to assist the Priest and/or Deacon in distributing Holy Communion on those occasions where a shortage of ordained clergy makes it impossible for them to distribute Holy Communion to all the faithful in a

---

<sup>1</sup> Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraphs 26 & 27.

<sup>2</sup> Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraph 28.

<sup>3</sup> The proper term for laypeople delegated to distribute Holy Communion at Mass is "Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion" here often abbreviated to "Extraordinary Minister". The preference for this term is noted in *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 156, which states "This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not "special minister of Holy Communion" nor "extraordinary minister of the Eucharist", nor "special minister of the Eucharist," by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened." The term "Eucharistic Minister" which had been commonly used, is likewise inappropriate, and should be avoided by those who coordinate Extraordinary Ministers.

reasonable way. It is thus a privilege to which the Church invites certain individuals under given circumstances, and not a right.

The distribution of Holy Communion should not be seen as a more complete exercise of the Priesthood that belongs to all believers in virtue of their baptism. Rather, it is to be understood as the exercise of a function that is proper to the ordained, but which, of necessity, must be carried out by others. This highlights the extraordinary nature of this service, which, rather than being part of the structure of the Church, is instead tied to particular needs arising from the limited number of clergy.

Pope John Paul II points this out in his instruction *Domenicae Cenae*:

To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained, one which indicates an active participation in the ministry of the Eucharist. It is obvious that the Church can grant this faculty to those who are neither Priests nor Deacons, as is the case with acolytes in the exercise of their ministry, especially if they are destined for future ordination, or with other lay people who are chosen for this to meet a just need, but always after an adequate preparation.<sup>4</sup>

### **III. When may Extraordinary Ministers be called upon?**

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal provides a basic description of the occasion when extraordinary ministers may be called upon:

The Priest may be assisted in the distribution of Communion by other Priests who happen to be present. If such Priests are not present and there is a very large number of communicants, the Priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, e.g., duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the Priest may depute suitable faithful for this single occasion.<sup>5</sup>

In order to allow flexibility for diverse local situations, the Church has avoided giving a precise definition of what constitutes a “very large number” of communicants. The Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest does give a more precise expression of this requirement:

Extraordinary ministers 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

---

<sup>4</sup> *Domenicae Cenae*, 11.

<sup>5</sup> GIRM 162.

numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion.<sup>6</sup>

The Instruction, *Immensae Caritatis* adds a fourth reason – to bring communion to the sick when no Priest or Deacon is available, or when they are impeded by other ministries. Thus there are four basic occasions when the Church calls upon the service of extraordinary ministers:

- at Mass, when the presider is physically unable to distribute Holy Communion;
- at Masses where the great number of faithful prevents the Priests and Deacons from distributing Holy Communion to all of them;
- at communion services when no ordained minister is available;
- and to the sick when they are unable to be visited by a Priest or Deacon.

**There are some practices that have developed in regard to the EMHC during Mass that will need to be adjusted. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) is quite clear regarding the ministry of the chalice when it says, “If Communion is given under both kinds, the Deacon himself administers the chalice to the communicants...”<sup>7</sup> (emphasis added).**

Only Bishops, Priests and Deacons are ordinary ministers of communion. Extraordinary ministers may be called upon only when the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion require assistance in distributing Holy Communion to the faithful in a timely manner.

**Therefore, when the Deacon is present at Mass, the Priest, as an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, will minister the Body of Christ and the Deacon, as an ordinary minister of Holy Communion, will minister the Blood of Christ. If a situation arises where a “great number of faithful prevents the Priests and Deacons from distributing Holy Communion to all of them,”<sup>8</sup> then extraordinary ministers may be called upon to assist the Priest in ministering the Body of Christ and extraordinary ministers may be called upon to assist the Deacon, when present, in ministering the Blood of Christ.**

**In this regard, since an EMHC during Mass only functions to assist the Priest or Deacon in distributing communion, the EMHC should not be used to take any remaining Body of Christ to the tabernacle, since that is not part of assisting in the distribution of communion. Other than assisting in the distribution of Holy Communion, the only other assistance the extraordinary minister may do is to “consume what remains of the Blood of Christ from their chalice of distribution**

---

<sup>6</sup> Instruction on Certain Questions, Art. 8, Sec. 2

<sup>7</sup> GIRM, 182

<sup>8</sup> Instruction on Certain Questions, Art. 8, Sec. 2

**with permission of the diocesan bishop.”<sup>9</sup> That permission has been granted by Bishop Parkes.**

#### **IV. Qualifications to Serve as an Extraordinary Minister**

It is important that those individuals selected to serve as extraordinary ministers be chosen carefully. The instruction *Immensae Caritatis* describes the qualifications:

The faithful who are special ministers of communion must be persons whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office, foster their own devotion to the eucharist, and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their own devotion and reverence toward the most august sacrament of the altar. No one is to be chosen whose appointment the faithful might find disquieting.<sup>10</sup>

In the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, the following norms also apply:

- an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, if married, must be in a valid marriage according to Church law,
- must have received the sacrament of Confirmation,
- and must be at least 16 years of age.

**A form in the appendix is supplied to aid in this process.** In addition, it is necessary that the individual receive the certification of their pastor that they are properly qualified and trained. Additional expectations may be added by the individual parish.

#### **V. Selection of Extraordinary Ministers**

Parishes are strongly encouraged to actively select individuals who are particularly well qualified to serve as extraordinary ministers, and not to simply ask for volunteers. The pastor is responsible for selecting individuals designated to serve and verifying that they are in good standing with the Church (not in an invalid marriage or a situation of cohabitation, not an ex-Priest<sup>11</sup>, etc.), and that their selection would not scandalize the faithful.

Pastors are encouraged to develop their own additional criteria for selecting extraordinary ministers, which might consist of participation in Eucharistic Adoration or in being active in stewardship programs, etc. The goal is to choose individuals whose exemplary

---

<sup>9</sup> Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraph 52.

<sup>10</sup> *Immensae Caritatis*, Sec. 1, paragraph VI.

<sup>11</sup> See *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 168

Catholic life and morals will reflect well upon the Church and show the dignity and importance of Holy Communion.

## **VI. Way of Life of an Extraordinary Minister**

Obviously, it is important that an individual demonstrate an exemplary Catholic life before becoming an EMHC. It is also important that they cultivate those virtues after they have been chosen for that position of service to the Church. Again, a bare minimum below which an individual who is presently mandated as an EMHC should disqualify himself or herself would consist in anything that would prevent him or her from receiving Holy Communion, such as grave sin, failure to attend Sunday Mass, or a choice not to maintain communion with the teachings and life of the Church.

Positively put, an EMHC should seek, like all Christians, to cultivate holiness of life, especially through frequent confession, personal prayer, especially before the Blessed Sacrament, and attendance at daily Mass if possible. They should also seek to have a good knowledge and appreciation for the beliefs of the Church, especially through study of scripture and Church teaching. If an EMHC finds it difficult to live a life appropriate to his function, he or she should withdraw for a time from the distribution of Holy Communion, or, if necessary, a pastor may find it necessary to ask an EMHC not to continue in this ministry.

## **VII. Training and On-going Formation of Extraordinary Ministers**

It is important that each parish have a formal program of preparation and yearly formation so that extraordinary ministers can understand the nature of their service, be well prepared to carry it out, and properly understand the Church's teaching, especially as regards the Blessed Sacrament and Holy Communion. The yearly formation can be a morning of reflection or some other such gathering. While each parish's program will differ according to local needs, the Diocese has given these guidelines which should be included in all training programs.

If the pastor chooses not to conduct the training himself or have it conducted by one of his Priests, it is important that he choose an individual or team to organize the training of extraordinary ministers. They should follow these norms in order to assure uniformity of training across the Diocese.

A pastor is free to accept individuals trained at another parish in the diocese for service in his own parish. He may require them to attend the training program at the local parish in order to make sure that they are familiar with local customs and procedures. These individuals, however, do not need to be re-certified by the Diocese.

## **VIII. Terminology for the Blessed Sacrament**

The way we speak both reflects and shapes the way we believe, and so it is important that our language regarding the Blessed Sacrament reflect our understanding of its nature, and our faith in the real presence of Christ. Although all of Christ is present under each species, it is customary to refer to the host after consecration as “the Body of Christ.” Likewise, the chalice may be referred to simply as “the chalice” or as “the Blood of Christ.” The terms “bread” and “wine” should be used to refer to the bread and wine brought forward as gifts, but not to the consecrated species, which are no longer bread or wine, but the Body and Blood of the Lord.

## **IX. Certification of Extraordinary Ministers**

Before an EMHC may serve the Church in a public capacity, it is necessary that an individual be certified before beginning service. While instituted acolytes (usually seminarians and men preparing for the Diaconate) become extraordinary ministers by virtue of their institution, other individuals require a specific commissioning.

## **X. Commissioning for an Extended Period**

In the diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee an EMHC is mandated for a period of five (5) years. This is done by the Bishop, upon request by the pastor of the parish.

After the individuals have been selected and trained, the pastor then submits a list to the office of the Director of Liturgy of the diocese who will submit them to the Bishop. When the mandate from the Bishop is received, they must first be commissioned according to the Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion contained in the Book of Blessings before they are allowed to function as an EMHC.<sup>12</sup>

Individuals who have been mandated and commissioned as extraordinary ministers may bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound within the parish boundaries, as directed by the Pastor. While their commission does not extend beyond the boundaries of the parish for which they are commissioned, their ministry to parishioners may legitimately take them outside the boundaries of the parish; i.e., hospitals, nursing homes, parishioner home, etc.

## **XI. Commissioning for a Single Occasion**

In some cases, a sufficient number of commissioned extraordinary ministers may be unavailable. In this case, if need requires, the Priest presiding at the liturgy can

---

<sup>12</sup> *Immensae Caritatis*, 1, VI; Book of Blessings, Chapter 63

commission extraordinary ministers for a single occasion, following the rite given in the Roman Missal.

## **XII. Preparation for Serving as an Extraordinary Minister**

In preparation for his or her service, the EMHC should make sure he or she is prepared to receive communion – is in a state of grace and has fasted before Mass according to the norms of the Church. Secondly, it is important that he or she arrive at the church early, not only to sign in and find out his or her station, but also to take some time in prayer before Mass to prepare for service.

## **XIII. Dress**

While each parish will further specify its guidelines for the dress of extraordinary ministers, the following minimal expectations apply across the diocese.

- Extraordinary ministers should dress in a way that is dignified and shows respect for the Blessed Sacrament, the assembled community and the function they are carrying out.
- Clothes should be clean and neat, modest in appearance and coverage of the body and reflect the importance of the celebration of the Eucharist. Generally this is done by dressing in a more formal fashion.
- As a minister, an important principle that must always be followed is that nothing should be worn which would draw attention to yourself or be distracting to the community.
- The EMHC should see to it that their hands are clean.
- They should also refrain from using cologne, perfume or aftershave on their day of service since some people have sensitivities to these scents and these fragrances often remain on one's hands and can be transferred to the Eucharist.
- In the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee an EMHC does not wear any special liturgical garb or symbols nor participate in the entrance procession of the Mass.

## **XIV. Actions During the Mass**

During the Mass, the EMHC sits with the rest of the faithful, and should participate fully in the Mass, listening to the readings, and joining the community in prayer.

## **XV. Approaching the Altar**

Each parish may have slightly different norms for how the EMHC is to come forward to receive communion and their vessels. Because of the different environments of each church, it is appropriate that in some places the ministers approach the sanctuary area as the Priest begins to receive communion so that they are in place when the Priest is ready



to distribute communion to the ministers. If the environment of the church requires that the ministers approach the altar to receive communion, then the norm of General Instruction of the Roman Missal is that they not approach the altar until after the Priest has received communion.<sup>13</sup>

## **XVI. Receiving Communion**

The precise arrangement for the EMHC to receive communion will vary from parish to parish. However, the following norm given by the Congregation for Divine Worship must be followed:

“To avoid creating confusion, certain practices are to be avoided and eliminated where such have emerged in particular Churches: Extraordinary Ministers receiving Holy Communion apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants...”<sup>14</sup>

## **XVII. Receiving a Vessel**

After receiving Holy Communion, the extraordinary minister will need to receive a ciborium or a chalice and proceed to the location where they will distribute Holy Communion. They are always to receive the ciborium or the chalice from the Priest or the Deacon.

It is important that they know where their station is, and, if extraordinary ministers need to pass to the rear of the church, that the ushers do not permit the aisles to become crowded until the extraordinary ministers are at their stations.

## **XVIII. Manner of Distributing and Receiving Holy Communion**

While the norm for the distribution of communion in the Roman Rite remains under one species and on the tongue, specific permissions have allowed communion under both species and communion on the hand to take place. It is important to consider each of these methods of receiving communion, because they each place particular burdens on the extraordinary minister.

First, communion under one species on the tongue. The communicant will make a sign of reverence (a bow is the norm in the United States), and then approach the minister standing. While standing is the norm in the United States, communion is not to be denied to those who prefer to kneel.<sup>15</sup>

When ministering the Body of Christ, the minister takes the host and shows it to the communicant, saying “**The Body of Christ.**” No other words are to be used, nor are names to be added to the words, “The Body of Christ.” In the same way, when

---

<sup>13</sup> GIRM 162.

<sup>14</sup> Instruction on Certain Questions, Art. 8, Sec. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum, 91.

ministering the Blood of Christ, the minister takes the host and shows it to the communicant, saying “**The Blood of Christ.**” No other words are to be used, nor are names to be added to the words, “The Blood of Christ.”<sup>16</sup>

The extraordinary minister should pay attention that no small fragments of the host fall to the ground. For this reason, the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* states that “the Communion-plate for the communion of the faithful should be retained, in order to avoid the danger of the Sacred Host or some fragment of it falling.”<sup>17</sup>

Where the communion plate is used, it is generally held by the server in such a way that it is under the Host at all times. If it is not used, it may be helpful to keep the host over the ciborium when possible.

## **XIX. Communion in the Hand**

The practice of receiving communion in the hand, which is permitted in the United States by a special indult from the Holy See, places additional requirements on the extraordinary minister, because it is necessary that they make sure that the Body of Christ is properly consumed, and that it is treated with reverence by the communicant. Pope John Paul II describes this difficulty:

“In some countries the practice of receiving Communion in the hand has been introduced. This practice has been requested by individual episcopal conferences and has received approval from the Apostolic See. However, cases of a deplorable lack of respect towards the eucharistic species have been reported ... This is in no way meant to refer to those who, receiving the Lord Jesus in the hand, do so with profound reverence and devotion, in those countries where this practice has been authorized.”<sup>18</sup>

Thus it is necessary for the extraordinary minister to observe the person receiving communion until he or she consumes the host. If they begin to walk off without receiving communion (as is sometimes the case with children who have not received proper catechesis or non-Catholic adults), it is important that the extraordinary minister follow that individual and either ask him to consume the host, or to retrieve the host. It is important to note that the decision to receive communion on the tongue or in the hand is on the part of the communicant, and it is not allowed to compel them to receive on the hand or on the tongue.

## **XX. Both Species**

The permission to distribute communion under both species in certain cases was granted by Pope Paul VI with the instruction *Sacramentali Communionem* in 1970, and with the publication of the revised GIRM in 2001. The responsibility for determining when it is

---

<sup>16</sup> GIRM, 161.

<sup>17</sup> *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 93.

<sup>18</sup> *Dominicae Cena*, 11.

appropriate to permit communion under both species rests with the diocesan bishop.<sup>19</sup> In the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, communion under both species is permitted at all Masses, meaning that the individual Priest celebrant may decide whether to offer communion under one or two species. If communion is offered under both species, the ordinary minister of the chalice is the Deacon, and depending on the size of the celebration may require the use of extraordinary ministers to assist the Deacon.

The only words used in distributing the Blood of Christ are “The Blood of Christ.” In distributing the Blood of Christ, it is important to avoid any danger of spillage. Care should be taken to make sure that the communicant has taken the chalice firmly before releasing it. The extraordinary minister should, in ordinary circumstances, not hold on to the chalice while an individual receives communion. After distributing communion, the extraordinary minister should take the chalice, wipe the lip of it with the purificator, and rotate it slightly. If communion is offered under both species, the decision to receive from the chalice or not belongs to the individual communicant.<sup>20</sup>

## **XXI. Communion for those with Celiac Disease**

Some individuals, for medical reasons, are unable to receive even a small particle of the Body of Christ. The Church accommodates those who suffer from this disease in two ways.

It is permitted for individuals to receive only the Blood of Christ. In such cases, communion from the chalice is distributed just as when the communicant receives under both species.

It is also possible, with the Bishop’s approval, to make use of approved low gluten hosts for those who suffer from this disease. The Bishop delegates all pastors give this approval in individual cases.

A list of sources for the Vatican approved low-gluten hosts is in the appendix as well as a sample letter to give to those suffering from this disease to present to pastors other parishes they may visit to see which form the pastor may allow.

## **XXII. Intinction**

Although the Church also permits Holy Communion under both species by intinction, that is not a custom in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee. Occasionally you will find some who would like to intinct the host themselves into the chalice with the Precious Blood, but that is never allowed. Only a Priest is allowed to administer Holy Communion by intinction.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> GIRM, 283

<sup>20</sup> GIRM, 284.

<sup>21</sup> GIRM, 287.

Redemptionis Sacramentum emphasizes that: “The communicant must not be permitted to intinct the host himself in the chalice, nor to receive the intincted host in the hand.”<sup>22</sup> If someone should approach a minister of the Precious Blood indicating they want to use intinction, the minister should cover the chalice with the purificator and politely tell the person that intinction in that manner is not allowed.

### **XXIII. Blessings**

Although they are not a part of the approved rite of the Mass nor has there been any guidance from Rome about this practice, it has become customary in many parts of the United States for individuals who are not receiving Holy Communion to come forward and ask for a blessing. Often this is indicated by hands crossed across the chest, although in some cultures, particularly Latin ones, people desiring to receive Holy Communion on the tongue may also come forward with crossed arms. If the extraordinary minister determines that a person is seeking a blessing, it is appropriate to respond with a prayer that is clearly distinct from the blessing given by a Priest. It is recommended to say, “May God bless you,” possibly while raising your hand. It is important that you not use the host in giving a blessing, and that you not touch the person with the fingers you use for distributing Holy Communion.

### **XXIV. Denying Holy Communion**

There are practically no situations when Holy Communion should be denied by an extraordinary minister. Referencing the Code of Canon Law (843, paragraph 1), Redemptionis Sacramentum says: “In distributing Holy Communion it is to be remembered that “sacred ministers may not deny the sacraments to those who seek them in a reasonable manner, are rightly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them”. [177] Hence<sup>23</sup> any baptized Catholic who is not prevented by law must be admitted to Holy Communion.”

The extraordinary minister should not make a judgment on the worthiness of any individual to receive Holy Communion. In the case of individuals clearly living a life in discrepancy with church teachings, the decision is to be made by the pastor, in consultation with the Bishop, and he will then inform the extraordinary ministers involved.

If the extraordinary minister is unsure whether an individual is Catholic or has received their first communion, he should ask them or their parent. Usually the parent will take care of the child. If the person is not Catholic, the extraordinary minister should politely let the person know that communion is reserved to Catholics.

---

<sup>22</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum, 104.

<sup>23</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum, paragraph 91.

## **XXV. Returning the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar**

After distributing communion, the extraordinary minister should return to the altar and hand the ciborium or chalice to the Priest or Deacon, or place it on the altar. If the extraordinary minister is distributing the Blood of Christ, the extraordinary minister is permitted to consume whatever remains of the Blood of Christ before returning to the altar.<sup>24</sup> If the vessel is empty, the Priest celebrant may determine that the vessel be placed on the credence table, rather than the altar, for purification immediately or following Mass.

If the extraordinary minister has been distributing the Body of Christ, he should take the opportunity to purify his fingers of any particles that may have clung to them. For this purpose, a small bowl of water is often provided at the tabernacle.

## **XXVI. Accidents Involving the Blessed Sacrament**

While every care should be taken to avoid accidents involving the Blessed Sacrament, the extraordinary minister should be prepared to respond to them should they occur. The most common sort of accident involves a particle of the host falling on the floor or another object. If a particle of the host falls on the floor, it should be picked up and consumed. If for some reason it cannot be consumed (for example, if it has already been in an individual's mouth who is unable to consume it, or the minister determines it is not healthy to consume the soiled host), it should be dissolved in water and the water later poured down the sacrarium, however, it is best to contact a Priest or Deacon should this be necessary.

A greater difficulty is presented if some of the Blood of Christ should fall to the floor. The extraordinary minister should insure that no one steps on the spot, perhaps by delegating an individual to guard it. A clean purificator could be used to mark the spot. Then, (perhaps with the Deacon's assistance) water should be brought and poured over the spot. The resulting spill should later be blotted with a purificator to remove as much as possible. If some of the Blood of Christ should drop on an individual's clothing or possessions, it should be treated in the same way, with due respect for the individual involved.

## **XXVII. Purification of Vessels**

Following the publication of the most recent edition of the GIRM, which stated that the sacred vessels are purified by a Priest, Deacon, or instituted acolyte,<sup>25</sup> the American bishops requested and received permission to allow extraordinary ministers

---

<sup>24</sup> Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, 52

<sup>25</sup> GIRM 279

to assist in the purification of vessels for a period of three years. That permission was granted, “as an experiment,” but expired on March 28, 2005. The American bishops requested a renewal of the indult, but Pope Benedict XVI determined that it was appropriate for the United States to have the same norms as the rest of the Church, and so the indult was not renewed.

Therefore purification should be carried out by a Priest, Deacon, or instituted acolyte either after communion or immediately following Mass. If done during Mass, the purification can take place on the altar or at the credence table. This requirement helps to emphasize that the purification of vessels is not simply “doing the dishes” but a part of the ritual of the Mass, by which respect is shown to Christ present in the Blessed Sacrament. Lay ministers may still assist in any cleaning or washing of the vessels that take place, but only after the ritual purification is complete.

## **XXVIII. Proper use of the Sacrarium**

A sacrarium is a special sink located in the sacristy. The drain of the sacrarium empties directly into the ground and is never connected with any other drainage pipe. The GIRM states the following about the sacrarium.

“The practice should be kept of building in the sacristy a sacrarium into which is poured the water from the washing of sacred vessels and linens.”<sup>26</sup> “If a host or any particle should fall, it is to be picked up reverently; and if any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy.”<sup>27</sup>

Nothing else should ever be poured down the sacrarium, including any remaining Precious Blood. The Precious Blood must always be consumed.

## **XXIX. Service to the Sick and Homebound**

While this document primarily deals with the service of extraordinary ministers at Mass, it should also be noted that extraordinary ministers are also frequently employed in bringing communion to those who are sick or homebound on those occasions when it is impossible for a Priest or Deacon to bring them communion in a regular fashion. It is encouraged that trainers of extraordinary ministers hold a separate training session for those who will be bringing communion to the homebound with individuals who have already completed the regular training session, so that the specific issues involved in this service may be presented with greater

---

<sup>26</sup> GIRM, #380.

<sup>27</sup> GIRM, #280.

depth. It is important that extraordinary ministers to the homebound become acquainted with the approved rites for communion in such circumstances, and that they have a copy of that ritual that they may use when distributing Holy Communion.

**All extraordinary ministers to the sick and homebound must undergo background screening, which includes fingerprinting, and they must complete the Safe Environment Program that is provided by the Diocese before they will be allowed to function in this ministry.**

### **XXX. Receiving the Blessed Sacrament**

The extraordinary minister will receive the Blessed Sacrament from the Priest or Deacon, sometimes within the context of Mass. They should have a metal pyx in which to place the host(s), and a burse (a small pouch) in which to place the pyx. The cord may be placed around the neck and then the burse (with the pyx inside) may be placed in a shirt pocket, or left hanging around the neck, or otherwise carried on the minister's person with the upmost reverence.

### **XXXI. Traveling to the Sick or Homebound**

**Once the extraordinary minister has received the Blessed Sacrament, it is important to go directly to the place where he or she is to distribute Holy Communion.**<sup>28</sup> They are not to make unrelated stops or engage in social conversations while in possession of the Blessed Sacrament. It is never allowed to take the Blessed Sacrament home for later distribution.<sup>29</sup> These are considered grave matters by the Church.<sup>30</sup>

### **XXXII. Distributing Communion to the Sick or Homebound**

Some things to remember when bringing Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound:

**Do:**

1. Make an appointment to visit. Ask how the person is feeling and if there will be others present. Also ask if they can prepare a table with a cloth, candle, cross or crucifix.

---

<sup>28</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum 133

<sup>29</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum 132

<sup>30</sup> Redemptionis Sacramentum 173

2. Once you have received the pyx with the consecrated hosts in it, proceed immediately to the person(s) to whom you will be bringing Holy Communion.
3. Use the ritual “Communion of the Sick” (Chapter 3) from Pastoral Care of the Sick and bring a missalette or Bible to read the scripture readings.
4. Begin informally. Introduce yourself to those who are present and briefly explain what you have come to do. Pay attention to how the sick/homebound person is feeling.
5. Invite those who are present to participate in the prayers. If they feel comfortable, enlist the help of family or friends to do the readings.
6. Based on the person’s strength/attentiveness, share with them the day’s homily.
7. Have a cup of water ready if the person has difficulty swallowing.
8. Create links to the parish, e.g., bring a parish bulletin, share news from the parish, ask if there is anything the parish can do for them.
9. Thank the person for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.
10. If you are unable to return any unconsumed hosts to the tabernacle at your parish immediately after your visit, you should consume any remaining hosts and purify the pyx.

**Don’t:**

1. Don’t visit a sick person if you are not feeling well yourself.
2. Don’t stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
3. Don’t compete with a television or radio. Politely ask if these can be turned off during the service.
4. Don’t carry the consecrated host in anything other than a pyx.
5. Don’t leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later date to see the sick person.

When taking Holy Communion to the sick or homebound, it is never allowed that the extraordinary minister receive communion. According to *Inaestimabile Donum*, a 1980 document of the Vatican Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, the lay faithful are not to self-communicate: “Communion is a gift of the Lord, given to the faithful through the minister appointed for this purpose. It is not permitted that the faithful should themselves pick up the consecrated bread and the sacred chalice; still less that they should hand them from one to another.”<sup>31</sup> (ID, no. 9).

It should be noted that receiving Communion in the hand does not constitute self-communication, because a minister is placing the host on the recipient’s hand.

There may be times when, due to illness or age, a person may receive Holy Communion, but not be able to swallow the host. When this happens it is neither

---

<sup>31</sup> *Inaestimabile Donum*, paragraph 9.



necessary nor advisable for the minister to consume the host. Rather, the partially consumed host should be wrapped in a tissue and be brought to the parish for proper disposal. It should be disposed of by placing it in water until it has dissolved, and then pouring the water into the sacrarium.

Under no circumstances should the host be discarded in the trash. As long as it still has the appearance of bread, it is still the Body of Christ and must be handled with reverence. The only acceptable means of discarding the host is to dissolve it in water and pour that water down the sacrarium.

### **XXXIII. Communion Services**

While conditions calling for Sunday celebrations in the absence of a Priest are not present in the Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, there are occasions when an EMHC might be called upon to perform a communion service. These are to be conducted in accord with the Rite of Distributing Holy Communion outside Mass with the Celebration of the Word, revised edition, 1983.

This Rite may be used when a Priest is unable to celebrate a regularly scheduled Mass, or on days when no Priest is available to celebrate Mass in a parish. A Deacon or instituted acolyte would normally conduct the service, but in their absence, an extraordinary minister might be called upon to perform this function. They should follow the norms given in the Rite, and what is said elsewhere in this document.