

Policy on the Use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese of Boston

Introduction

The ordinary minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest or deacon (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 the Sacrament as needed (canons 230, §3 and 910, §2).¹

The following policy for extraordinary ministers serving in the Archdiocese of Boston is effective on 1 March 2009, replacing those issued on February 20, 1991. This new text reflects changes in both the universal law governing the Eucharist, as well as the particular law for the United States, and it must be read and interpreted in a way harmonious with these texts.²

Role of Extraordinary Ministers

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

Outside of Mass, some 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 the Archdiocese of Boston, pastors⁵ have been granted the habitual faculty to appoint extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in their respective parishes⁶, as well as for institutions

¹ 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 precepts of the law.”

² For example, universal law on the Eucharist is found in the *Code of Canon Law* and the 2000 *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*. Particular law for the United States includes the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, which took effect on April 7, 2002, replacing *This Holy and Living Sacrifice*.

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* at n. 158: “...the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged.”

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 word *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.

within their parish boundaries. In addition, any priest celebrant may designate suitable persons to distribute Communion for a specific occasion when the need arises.

Ordinarily, the pastor should consult members of the pastoral staff to ascertain the need for extraordinary ministers of Communion, as well as to identify possible candidates; general calls for volunteers should not be extended. Moreover, the selection of candidates must not be presented as a “reward” for active involvement; the extraordinary ministers chosen should reflect the diversity of the community in which they will serve.

Once candidates are identified, a personal invitation should be extended from the pastor or his delegate to an appropriate number of qualified individuals. This number should be determined by 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 Archdiocese of Boston, they must have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, be at least sixteen years of age and participate regularly in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. If the extraordinary minister is married, the marriage must be one 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, there should be mutual discernment by the extraordinary minister and the pastor regarding continuation. This discernment should take 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.

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 for Extraordinary Ministers

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should 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. The Archdiocesan Office of Worship and Spiritual Life will assist parishes with this responsibility, both by offering regular formation programs and by assisting parishes in locating qualified individuals to conduct these programs on the parish level.

Any training program held at the parish or institutional level must provide content consistent with those programs directly sponsored by the Office of Worship and Spiritual Life. This office will provide a recommended syllabus and bibliography upon request.

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

The Liturgical Presence of Extraordinary Ministers at Mass

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

Extraordinary ministers must dress in a manner consonant with the dignity of the service they offer. In the Archdiocese of Boston, secular clothing is preferred, although ministers may also wear an alb at the discretion of the pastor. No other vesture or other garment is permitted. However, the practice of having extraordinary ministers wear a cross, medal or 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 should refrain from using strong cologne, aftershave or perfume. Some people have heightened sensitivity to these scents, which may remain on one's hands and be transferred to the Sacrament.

Procedures for Extraordinary Ministers

Scheduled extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should arrive well before the Mass at which they are to serve. However, if sufficient priests and deacons are present for the orderly distribution of the Sacrament at Mass, extraordinary ministers should 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 should ensure that scheduled extraordinary ministers have arrived and notify the priest celebrant if additional extraordinary ministers need to be invited from the assembly. For example, when Holy Communion is to be given under both kinds and most people in the assembly receive from the cup, there should be two ministers of the chalice scheduled for each minister of the consecrated host noting that, if a deacon is present at the celebration, he traditionally is a minister of the chalice.

According to the custom of the parish, extraordinary ministers may or may not participate in the entrance and recessional with the priest 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 assembly (*i.e.*, standing, kneeling and sitting at the appropriate times).

If they are not already in the sanctuary, extraordinary ministers enter it during the *Agnus Dei*. However, they do not assist in breaking the consecrated bread.

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

⁷ See *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* at n. 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."

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

After all the extraordinary ministers have received Communion, the priest celebrant or deacon hands the vessels containing the Body or Blood of the Lord to the extraordinary ministers for the administration of Communion.

The extraordinary minister who is distributing the Body of Christ holds the Eucharistic bread 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 consecrated bread is placed in the communicant's hand or on the tongue. Should an extraordinary minister believe that a communicant has not consumed the Body of Christ, this should be brought to the attention of the priest celebrating the Mass at an opportune time (e.g., after the distribution of Communion or immediately following the Mass).

The extraordinary minister who is administering the Blood of Christ holds the chalice up slightly, looks at the communicant and says in a clear voice, *The Blood of Christ*, to which the communicant responds, *Amen*. Generally, the communicant should hold the cup and drink from it, but the extraordinary minister should be prepared to assist in holding the cup in the case of physical infirmity or weakness. After each communicant receives the Blood of Christ, the extraordinary minister should wipe the rim of the cup with the purificator and turn the cup 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 (e.g., in a homily, bulletin insert, etc.), to explain that one receives the fullness of Christ by reception of the consecrated host alone. If the parish chooses to use intinction as the method for distributing the Eucharist, then both the assembly and the extraordinary ministers must be properly instructed on how this is to be done in accord with liturgical law. It should be noted that administration of the Sacrament in this fashion is not the preferred method in the dioceses of the United States.

The liturgical blessing of the Mass is given to all the faithful at the conclusion of the Mass, and extraordinary ministers are not to bless persons (and/or lay a hand/hands upon them) in place of administering the Sacrament.

Any remaining consecrated bread must be consumed or placed in the tabernacle, and any remaining consecrated wine must be consumed. The remaining consecrated bread and consecrated wine may be consumed by the extraordinary minister. It is not permitted to pour the Blood of Christ down the sacrarium under any circumstances.

The purification of sacred vessels at Mass may be done only by a priest, deacon or instituted acolyte (GIRM, n. 279), at either the altar or the credence table (GIRM, nn. 182-183). The preferred practice in the Archdiocese of Boston is to purify the vessels immediately following the conclusion of the congregation's reception of the Eucharist.

After the vessels have been purified, they should be washed by the sacristan, an extraordinary minister of communion, or some other designated person.

Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

The Eucharist is “strength for those who journey in hope through this life and who desire to dwell with God in the life to come.”⁸ Therefore, pastors should make every effort to bring the Sacrament to members of the Body of Christ who are unable to celebrate the Mass in community due to advanced age or infirmity.⁹ Extraordinary ministers of Communion may assist pastors in this duty. However, the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound is a pastorally sensitive 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 Archdiocese of Boston relative to background checks, for their own safety and protection and that of the people they serve.

It is desirable that visits to the sick and homebound to bring Communion occur after the parish liturgy 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*.¹⁰

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 Communion. The Sacrament must never be taken home overnight to be distributed the next day. The extraordinary minister should consume consecrated hosts that cannot be distributed that same day.¹¹

Mishaps with the Blessed Sacrament

If a piece of consecrated bread falls to the ground during the distribution of Communion, the extraordinary minister should pick it up immediately and consume it, either then or after the distribution of Communion is finished.

If the consecrated wine is spilled, the area should be covered immediately with a purificator and cleaned with damp cloths after Mass. These cloths should be rinsed thoroughly, with the water used being poured in the sacrarium.

If an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is unsure how to handle a particular situation, it is best to bring the matter to the attention of the priest.

⁸ See *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, n. 4.

⁹ See Pope Benedict XVI, post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* (March 2007), n. 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.”

¹⁰ 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 would be placed on the altar during the Preparation of the Gifts.

¹¹ 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 (e.g., securing an appropriate container).

Other special questions and cases not addressed in this document should be referred to the Office of Worship and Spiritual Life.