

*The Ministry of an  
Extraordinary Minister  
Of Holy Communion  
In the Diocese of Peoria*



*“Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you do not have  
LIFE within you.” - John 6:53*



As part of the liturgical renewal of the Second Vatican Council, the Church invited faithful lay men and women to help ordained ministers in the distribution of Holy Communion.

In the years since these liturgical changes, Extraordinary Ministers of the Holy Communion have become an important ministry in the life of our parishes. Their presence and ministry in the liturgy has facilitated the giving and receiving of Holy Communion so that the Communion Rite is not prolonged. Their presence has also allowed many parishes to enjoy distributing Holy Communion under both species, under the form of bread and wine.

Additionally, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have been a great assistance in bringing Holy Communion to the sick and elderly confined to their homes and thereby prevented from participation at Mass.

## **BEING AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION**

All EMHCs should be mature Catholics in good standing, persons of excellent character, who take their faith seriously, and have respect and reverence for the Eucharist. It is indeed a great privilege to be an EMHC. Being an EMHC is a wonderful opportunity to increase devotion to the Most Holy Eucharist. Besides your service at Mass, you are also invited to increase your devotion to the Eucharist through periods of Adoration and spiritual reading on the Eucharist. There are many excellent resources for further prayer and study available from Catholic publishers and book stores. Many, if not most, of the parishes of our diocese also offer extended periods of Adoration and regular Eucharistic holy hours which can be particularly helpful for communion ministers.

## REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PREPARATION AND CONTINUING FORMATION OF EMHC

1. Each EMHC should be fully initiated (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist), a practicing Catholic, and good role model for the congregation.
2. Besides being well trained in the rites of distributing Holy Communion within Mass and bringing Communion to the sick or homebound, the spiritual formation of Communion ministers is most important. Besides fostering individual Eucharistic devotion, pastors should offer regular gatherings for EMHC's to both review procedures and offer spiritual renewal.
3. An EMHC must be commissioned by the Diocese of Peoria for service to a specific parish for a period of three years. If you have not been re-commissioned over the last three years, you must go through commissioning again before you may serve as an EMHC.
4. An EMHC should not participate in another ministry at the same mass. However, exceptions may be made if there is a shortage of authorized and trained ministers.
5. Signed affidavits are required from the individuals testifying that they have been trained according to diocesan norms. These are submitted to the Bishop's Office before the EMHC is commissioned.

## **REVERENCE**

During Mass, when you approach or leave the sanctuary, a profound bow from the waist is made towards the altar since that is the focus sacrificial offering. When crossing the sanctuary it is no longer appropriate to genuflect when passing before the tabernacle, but rather to make a bow to the altar. (When you are actually carrying a vessel with the Blessed Sacrament, you need not make any sign of reverence as you have the Lord in your hands.)

When receiving Holy Communion, the Bishops of our country ask us to make a bow of the head as a sign of reverence and to receive Communion standing. Of course, no one is to be denied Communion should they do otherwise. It can be particularly helpful to your own spirituality as a Communion minister to arrive before Mass with sufficient time to prepare your mind and heart for Mass. Also, try to make a thanksgiving after Mass- even if you remain after Mass for just a few minutes to help foster your devotion as a minister of our Lord's Body and Blood.

At times outside of Mass, one should genuflect with the right knee when passing in front of the tabernacle and when entering or leaving the pew.

## **THE COMMUNION RITE**

The new General Instruction for the Roman Missal calls for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to approach the altar only after the priest has received Communion. In some parishes, this means waiting outside of the sanctuary, perhaps even kneeling at the sanctuary steps or to the side after the Lamb of God or coming up from your places in the pews.

After he has received Communion, the priest will distribute Communion to the EMHC's who bow in reverence before receiving the Host and again before receiving the Precious Blood. Then the priest celebrant will give you the vessels for distributing the

Host or Precious Blood to the faithful. Ministers must receive Communion before they are able to distribute the Sacrament to others.

When distributing Communion, focus your attention on the person to whom you are giving the Eucharist. Hold up the Body of Christ, speak to the person clearly and audibly: “The Body of Christ.” Then the communicant will respond: “Amen.” If the person does not say Amen, it is appropriate to gently answer for them.

Likewise, when distributing the Precious Blood, present the chalice to the communicant and say: “The Blood of Christ.” When they return the chalice to you, wipe the rim of the cup with the purificator, turn the cup slightly for the next communicant.

Although it may seem “homey” and friendly, it is inappropriate in the Roman Rite to use the name of the communicant who is receiving – i.e. “Bobby, the Body of Christ”. This may actually make visitors and guests feel less welcome.

In the Diocese of Peoria, we invite those not receiving Holy Communion to come forward for a blessing. When a non-Catholic or Catholic who does not wish to receive Communion walks up with arms crossed, you may bless them by placing your hand on their shoulder and saying “May God Bless you today and always” or some other simple and brief prayer. Only an ordained minister may make the sign of the Cross in the blessing.

If you are certain that a communicant is non-Catholic and yet gestures to receive Communion, you should gently place your hand on their shoulder and bless them saying something like, “May God Bless you today and always.” In other words, an EMHC ought not distribute Communion to someone whom they know is a non-Catholic. If the person seems confused, you may always ask them if they want to receive Communion.\*

From time to time, you may find a communicant who wishes to “self-intinct” the host into the chalice. You should gently remind them that this is not permitted without causing a scene in the Communion line. Talk to the priest after Mass if there is a problem.

If a Host should fall on the ground, stop and pick it up reverently. The Host should be consumed or completely dissolved in water before being purified in the sacrarium. If some of the Precious Blood should spill, immediately after Communion the area should be washed with water and purificators. Be careful not to panic when such mishaps occur. Rushed and hasty efforts to safeguard the Blessed Sacrament may actually lead to further chaos and unfortunate mistakes.

After distributing Holy Communion, the EMHC should not consume any remaining Precious Blood in the chalice, unless otherwise directed, and place the chalice or ciborium on the corporal on the altar for the priest or deacon to purify unless he purifies immediately after Mass in which case he may ask you to place the vessels and cover them on a corporal on a side table.

After distributing the Hosts (especially if you feel particles on your fingers), it is a good practice to purify your fingers in a small vessel called the ablution cup. This is usually kept next to the tabernacle or on the credence table.

## **DRESS CODE**

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should dress appropriately for this important ministry and honor. Modes, sober dress that might become a nice dinner party or business meeting can be examples of acceptable dress. Some parishes may even ask Communion ministers to wear special vesture or insignia, like a cross or pin. Obviously appropriate personal appearance is required. You might make sure to wash your hands just before Mass.

## **EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS AND ORDINARY MINISTERS**

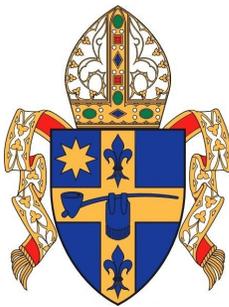
It is important to remember that lay ministers are invited to share in the ministry of distributing Holy Communion that is properly a ministry for the Ordained. Bishops, priests, and deacons are ordained by the Church to be distributors of the Sacrament. It is a special privilege to share in their work. If from time to time, an extra priest concelebrates the Mass or is present in the sanctuary for the Communion Rite, please do not feel slighted that Father “took your place.” With the proper humble disposition of prayer, we can all work together to give God proper praise. Likewise, the increased presence of deacons in our parishes can sometimes mean that lay ministers need to step aside to allow the ordained to fulfill their proper function.

### **SPECIAL DUTIES AND CIRCUMSTANCES**

Besides the usual duties of distributing Holy Communion at Mass, EMHC's are asked to be especially generous in assisting priests in the ministry to the sick. While many of us live very busy lives, every EMHC should seriously consider volunteering to bring Communion to the sick, homebound, and nursing home parishioners regularly, at least once a month. Not only does this type of ministry provide invaluable service to the priests, but can be great aid in fostering one's own prayer and Eucharistic devotion.

From time to time, an EMHC may also be called upon to lead periods of Eucharistic Adoration – either by exposing or reposing the Blessed Sacrament. You will need the explicit permission of your pastor before leading such times of prayer and he can help prepare you for the proper ritual to be followed.

On other, more exceptional, occasions, an EMHC may be called upon to lead Communion services in his or her parish when a priest is prevented from offering a weekday Mass. If this should happen, be sure to review carefully the proper ritual to be followed and be sure to avoid any semblance of “offering Mass” in Father's place. A Communion Service may never replace the celebration of Sunday Mass without the explicit permission of the Bishop or Vicar General.



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