

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

The office of minister of lay Holy Communion was officially instituted by Pope Paul VI in 1973. The principle behind the move was and is the spiritual good of the faithful. Reception of Holy Communion must not become impossible or difficult because of a shortage of priests or because a priest is not available - hence the need for lay ministers. Ministers exercise a noble office, confident in the knowledge that by their ministry they are serving their fellow Catholics and promoting their spiritual wellbeing by making it possible for Christ's body and blood to be received by the faithful. It is forbidden for priests and deacons, who are, of course, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, to sit down and leave the distribution to lay ministers. This doesn't apply where the priest is incapacitated.

PROCEDURE AT ST VINCENT'S

The Holy Communion ministers come to the sanctuary after the priest has received Holy Communion but not during. The hosts used at Holy Communion should be the same ones consecrated at the Mass being said.

If you run out of hosts the priest will go to the tabernacle and put some extra hosts in your communion dish. After Holy Communion is distributed the chalices and patens are left on the side of the altar for the priest to purify. If there is any consecrated wine left in the chalices, the priest will drink it, not the Holy Communion ministers. The servers take the sacred vessels back to the credence table after the priest has purified them.

To receive Holy Communion people should be at liberty to leave their seats whenever they wish whether they be at the front or back of the church. The less regimentation there is, the better. If there is a large crowd at Mass, I am considering having three people distribute the Sacred Hosts so that it is not too prolonged. Have you any suggestions as how best to do this Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, as well as distributing Holy Communion during Sunday Mass should also be willing to take it to the Sick and housebound. Is this running smoothly at present?

The ideal situation is where the minister has only one person to go to on Sunday.

Ministers of communion are also allowed to expose the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance for exposition and repose it after the period of prayer is over. They are not allowed to give the blessing.

TAKING HOLY COMMUNION TO THE SICK

Here at St Vincent's people are 'send out' towards the end of the Sunday morning Mass (before the concluding rites) accompanied by a prayer

In the communicant's house there should normally be a table covered with a white cloth on which should stand a crucifix with lighted candles. Ministers are not required to provide these. The sick or housebound person will normally be expecting you. A period of silence should be observed after the person has received the sacred host. Appropriate set or spontaneous prayers can also be said after Communion. They can be read from a book or based on the Gospel of the Sunday. I can provide you with 'prayers after Holy Communion' if you so wish. The reading during the Service should be short and, if possible, Eucharistic in character. The communicant can drink some water after receiving the host if he or she so wishes. Some ill people find it difficult to swallow the

sacred host. If some of the host falls out of the sick person's mouth, please wrap it in a paper tissue or napkin and return it to the Church where Fr Paddy will have it burnt. There is a little booklet which you can use. Just ask the priest for it.

Except in an emergency, sacred hosts should not be kept in your house. If you have hosts left after your visits to the sick, they should be brought back to the Church.

If I remember rightly Eucharistic ministers are commissioned for a period of four years after which, if they wish to continue as a minister, should be re-commissioned.

Communion time with a sick or housebound person will normally involve exchanging pleasantries but not engagement in extended conversation about all and sundry. The communicant needs time to pray in silence after they receive the host.

Ministers should be discreet about the condition of the sick or housebound person since it is private information. However, you should always let the priest know if, in your judgement, the time has come for the person to receive the Sacrament of the Sick or if the sick person so wishes,

the Sacrament of Penance. The family of the sick person should be aware that we are taking communion to their sick or housebound relative. The Sacrament of the Sick (Anointing) may be given to any weak or infirm person especially those who are old and infirm.

The minister of communion are conscious that they hold a liturgical ministry authenticated by the Church and that they should endeavour to live lives in conformity with the Gospel. They should cultivate a warm and friendly attitude towards the community to which they belong.

THE MASS

1088. "Christ is always present in his Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the Sacrifice of the Mass not only in the person of his minister, 'the same Christ now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross,' but especially in the Eucharistic species. By his power he is present in the sacraments so that when anybody baptizes, it is really Christ himself who baptizes. He is present in his word since it is he himself who speaks when the holy Scriptures are read in the Church. Lastly, he is present when the Church prays and sings, for he has promised 'where two

or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.'"

THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

1323. "At the Last Supper, on the night he was betrayed, our Saviour instituted the Eucharistic sacrifice of his Body and Blood. This he did in order to perpetuate the sacrifice of the cross throughout the ages until he should come again, and so to entrust to his beloved Spouse, the Church, a memorial of his death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity, a Paschal banquet 'in which Christ is consumed, the mind is filled with grace, and a pledge of future glory is given to us.

THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION

(From the Roman document *'Redemptionis Sacramentum'*)

[154]. As has already been recalled, “the only minister who can confect the Sacrament of the Eucharist in persona Christi is a validly ordained Priest” [254] - hence the name “Eucharistic Minister” belongs properly to the Priest alone. Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon, [255] to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ’s faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete [156.] The person who holds this ministry is to be known as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not “Eucharistic Minister” by which name the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.

The practice of those Priests is reprobated who, even though present at the celebration, abstain from distributing Holy Communion and hand this function over to laypersons.[258]. This doesn't apply if the priest is unwell. [158.] Indeed, 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.[259] This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.

[159.] It is never allowed for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone else to administer the Eucharist, as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick communicant.

133.] A Priest or Deacon, or an extraordinary minister who takes the Most Holy Eucharist

should go insofar as possible directly from the Church to the sick person's home, leaving aside any profane business so that any danger of profanation may be avoided and the greatest reverence for the Body of Christ may be ensured. Furthermore the Rite for the administration of Communion to the sick, as prescribed in the Roman Ritual, is always to be used.[226]