November 2026

Introduction

Thank you for responding to the call to serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (EMHC)! The EMHC[1] 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 Mass. It is an honor and a privilege to serve in this capacity, and, of course, careful preparation on the part of the extraordinary minister is required.

The purpose of this document is to assist extraordinary ministers by providing some insight on the theological principles behind the Eucharist and the role of the EMHC, the teachings of the Church on the subject, and some suggestions that may prove useful in your service to the Church.

This document is not all-inclusive; you may encounter a situation not covered by this guide. When that happens, use your best judgment and remember to be reverent, respectful, and Christ-like in your actions. Of course, after Mass you may ask the Deacon or Priest for guidance.

The difference between an Ordinary Minister and an Extraordinary Minister

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 the faithful the very Body and Blood of Christ. Bishops, Priests, and the Deacons who assist them are *ordinary* ministers of Holy Communion.[2]

An EMHC is a lay person or religious who has been designated to assist the Bishop, Priest and/or Deacon in distributing Holy Communion. Because distribution of Communion is proper to the Bishop, Priest, or Deacon, use of laypersons to assist them when necessary is considered to be *extraordinary*. It is a *privilege* to which the Church invites certain people, and not a *right*.

Terminology for the Blessed Sacrament

[1] The proper term for laypeople delegated to distribute Holy Communion at Mass is "Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion" here often abbreviated as "EMHC". 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."

[2] Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraphs 26 & 27

It is important that our language regarding the Blessed Sacrament reflect our understanding of its nature as the real presence of the Body and Blood of Christ. Although all of Christ is present in each species, it is customary to refer to the host (after consecration) as "the Body of Christ." Likewise, the contents of the chalice are usually referred to as "the Blood of Christ" or the "Precious Blood." The terms "bread" and "wine" should ONLY be used to refer to the bread and wine brought forward as gifts before consecration, but NOT to the consecrated species, which are no longer bread and wine, but the Body and Blood of our Lord.

Preparation for Serving as an EMHC

- Each EMHC should make sure that he or she is prepared to receive communion (is in a state of grace with no knowledge of mortal sin and has fasted before Mass according to the norms of the Church).
- Copies of the EMHC schedule are available in the sacristy and on the parish webpage. The schedule is also published in the bulletin one week in advance. Please be aware of when you are scheduled. If you cannot serve at the scheduled time, it is your responsibility to find a replacement. A contact list of all approved EMHC's is located in the sacristy.
- It is possible that you may be scheduled to serve as an EMHC, but not needed. This may happen if more than one Deacon assists at Mass or if there is a concelebrating Priest. Please pay attention; if you are scheduled but not needed, remain in your pew.
- If you are not scheduled but notice what appears to be a shortage of EHMC's, please take a few moments to assess the situation before proceeding to the front. The scheduled person(s) may be approaching from behind you. Your willingness to help is appreciated, but those who are scheduled should be given sufficient time to come forward in order to avoid the distraction and potential embarrassment of the extra person having to go back to their pew.

Reverence

Please be reverent in all your actions; walk at a reasonable pace, speak in a professional tone and volume, smile, etc. Reverence should also be evident in the way you humbly bow, genuflect, handle the Precious Body or Blood of Christ, etc. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, "The gestures and bodily posture of both the Priest, the Deacon, and the Ministers, and also of the people, must be conducive to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity…"[3] How you look and act tells people how seriously you take the ministry of EMHC. It also communicates what you think about the Eucharist.

[3] General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) 42

Dress

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.[4]

- Clothing should be neat, clean, modest, tasteful, not casual (jeans, t-shirts, flip-flops, tank tops, etc.) and should reflect proper reverence. *Jesus is as present in the Eucharist as he would be if visiting your house*. Please dress accordingly!
- Clothing that intentionally draws attention to yourself or is distracting to other parishioners should not be worn.
- Some people are sensitive to the smell of perfume and cologne. Please use them sparingly, if at all.

Approaching the Altar

Wait until after the Sign of Peace, and then:

- Proceed to the front and enter the sacristy closest to your side of the church. DO NOT COME DIRECTLY TO THE SANCTUARY[5] (the place around the altar). If using the center aisle, bow to the altar and then proceed to a sacristy.
- Cleanse your hands using the anti-bacterial hand cleaner provided.
- Quietly proceed to your place well behind the altar.
- If the Deacon is present, he will retrieve from the tabernacle the ciboria containing the Body of Christ. If the lector is also an EMHC, he or she should retrieve the Body of Christ from the tabernacle if the Deacon is not present. If the lector is not an EMHC, then another EMHC should retrieve the Body of Christ.
    - If an EMHC retrieves the Body of Christ from the tabernacle, the EMHC bows or genuflects after opening the tabernacle, prior to removing the ciborium. The tabernacle doors remain open.

Receiving Holy Communion

- As a gesture of reverence, you should bow before receiving the Sacrament.[6]

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[4] USCCB, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraph 29

[5] Congregation for the Clergy, *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest*, Article 8, No. 2; GIRM 162; and USCCB, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraph 38

[6] GIRM 160

- EMHC's must never self-communicate, meaning taking the Body from the ciborium or the Blood from the chalice and administering it to themselves. Both the Body and Blood must always be received from the Priest, Deacon, or another EMHC.[7]

Distributing Holy Communion

- Please be respectful and charitable toward the people who come before you for Communion. All who receive Communion are your brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of race, social class, gender, personal situation, etc. As an EMHC, your attitude and actions speak for the Church. As such, they should be in line with her teachings.
- Each communicant can decide whether they would like to receive the Body of Christ on the tongue or in the hand. A communicant's intentions might not always be obvious. Be attentive to their actions and gestures so as to avoid confusion that may lead to the Body of our Lord being dropped.
- It is acceptable for a person to kneel to receive Communion.
- If a communicant approaches with his or her arms crossed, EMHC's may say "God bless you" or something similar, but DO NOT give a blessing such as "May almighty God bless you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" or say anything that sounds like or could be perceived as a blessing. Also, DO NOT trace a cross in front of or over the person, or on their forehead, or lay your hands on them. These are all actions which are proper to the clergy.[8]
- The proper and only permissible form for distributing Holy Communion is to offer the consecrated bread by saying, "The Body of Christ" and to offer the consecrated wine by saying, "The Blood of Christ." No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way.[9] If a person does not respond with "Amen," you may quietly say it for them.
- In saying "The Body (or Blood) of Christ," speak to the communicant; not to the cup, ciborium, or thin air.
- If communicants present themselves for Communion, give them Communion unless they have their arms crossed over their chests. It is not the EMHC's job to determine a person's suitability to receive Communion. If necessary, mention specific situations to the Priest or Deacon after Mass.

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[7] GIRM 160 and USCCB, *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, paragraph 44

[8] Article 6 of the document *Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* says, "Every effort must be made to avoid even the appearance of confusion which can spring from anomalous liturgical practices."

[9] USCCB, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass, 5th bullet point

- If a communicant takes the Body of Christ and begins walking away without consuming it, try to quickly but discretely ask them to consume it. The Body of Christ cannot be taken back to a person's pew to consume. If a person is not cooperative or you are not able to be discrete, do not allow the situation to become disruptive. Proceed with distributing Communion and, if you are able, try to remember who was involved and mention it to the Deacon or Priest after Mass.
- Communicants may not take the Body of Christ and dip it into the Precious Blood. If a communicant attempts this, simply cover the chalice with your hand or the purificator cloth and politely say, "I'm sorry, that's not permissible[10]. Please consume the host" or something similar. Again, don't allow the situation to become disruptive.
- When distributing the Blood of Christ, after each communicant receives the Precious Blood, wipe the rim of the chalice (both the inside and outside edge) with the purificator cloth. This action is a matter of both reverence and hygiene. For the same reason, rotate the chalice slightly after each communicant has received the Precious Blood.[11]
- If a host is dropped by a communicant, he or she may still consume it. If a person appears to be uncomfortable with consuming it, you may take it from them and offer them another. In this case, <u>do not</u> put the dropped host back in the ciborium; hold onto it until after Communion, and then give it to the Priest or Deacon and explain to them that it was dropped on the floor.
- If any of the Precious Blood is spilled during Communion, immediately place the purificator cloth over the spill. You will need another purificator cloth to continue distributing the Precious Blood. Additional purificator cloths can be found in the sacristy, in the top drawer of the cabinet immediately to the right of the sink. If all of the Precious Blood is spilled, or if the spill is too large to be covered by one purificator cloth, get another purificator cloth from the sacristy and cover the spill. While you are covering the spill and getting another purificator cloth, don't worry that people aren't able to receive the Precious Blood. Remember, Christ is fully present in both species. After Communion, tell the Priest or Deacon about the spill.

[10] *Redemptionis Sacramentum* 104: "The communicant must not be permitted to intinct the host himself in the chalice…"

[11] USCCB, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, paragraph 45

Returning the Blessed Sacrament to the Altar

- After distributing communion, the EMHC who distributed the Body of Christ should return the ciborium to the altar or give it to the Deacon. The EMHCs who distributed the Precious Blood should place the chalice on the credence table. DO NOT take it into the sacristy.
- If any of the Precious Blood remains, it is permissible for the EMHC to consume it at the credence table. If the EMHC is not comfortable consuming it, it may be placed on the credence table to be consumed by the Deacon or Priest. The remaining Precious Blood should NEVER be poured down the drain in the sacristy sink. This is a sacrilege!
- EMHC's should NOT take empty chalices used in distributing the Precious Blood into the sacristy to clean them. They MUST be purified by the Deacon, Priest, or instituted Acolyte[12]. Purification of the vessels is not simply "doing the dishes," but a ritual of the Mass, by which respect is shown to Christ.
- EMHC's should only return ciboria containing consecrated hosts to the tabernacle when directed to do so by the Deacon or Priest.
- After returning the sacred vessels to the altar, exit via the same sacristy you used when you came forward and quietly return to your pew.

Questions?

Please contact Deacon Rick or Father John.

[12] GIRM 279.