

St. John the Evangelist, Vancouver

GUIDELINES FOR E.M.H.C. (Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion)

7/9/2017

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), the first document promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, reaffirmed that Christ is always present in the Church, especially in its liturgical celebrations. Christ is present when the Church prays and sings, in the proclamation of the Word, and in the person of the minister. Finally, the Council stressed that Christ is especially present under the Eucharistic elements (CSL, no. 7). For the Catholic, the liturgical gathering is of paramount importance. It is fitting then, that our liturgical celebrations are described as: the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all the Church's power flows (CSL, no. 10). While the heart of the celebration of Mass is the Eucharistic Prayer, the consummation of the liturgy is found in the act of Holy Communion. In the gathering, in the breaking of the bread, in the eating and the drinking the faithful are joined together as members of Christ's mystical Body, sharing the one life of the Spirit. In the great sacrament of the altar, we are joined to Christ Jesus and to one another. It is not surprising then, that in order to promote fuller participation in the Holy Eucharist, the Second Vatican Council called for the faithful present at each Mass to communicate not only by spiritual desire but also by sacramental Communion (General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002 [GIRM 2002], no. 13). If a large number of the faithful are present, the presider will frequently need assistance in distributing Communion so that the Communion Rite is not unduly long. He will regularly need this assistance when Communion is given under both kinds, the form of Communion that more clearly signifies the Eucharistic banquet (GIRM 2002, nos. 281-282). To that end, deacons and concelebrating priests assist as ordinary ministers of Communion. However, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC), either formally commissioned for a given period or temporarily deputed by the presider, will frequently give this assistance (GIRM 2002, nos. 162 & 284.a. and NDRHC, no. 28). These individuals serve Christ who is present in the assembly by ministering his Body and Blood to their sisters and brothers. They may also serve the Body of

Christ by taking Communion to those members who, through sickness or old age are prevented from taking part in the Mass. In accord with a most ancient tradition, it is most appropriate for Communion to be taken directly from the Sunday Eucharist to the sick and those unable to leave their homes. Genuine ministry is about humble service. The model for all ministries is Christ the Lord who came to serve, not to be served. His command to “love one another” (cf. John 13:43) was modeled throughout his life and ministry. Therefore, an EMHC must put aside personal agendas and personal needs, prejudices and judgements in order to serve the community and give faithful testimony to Christ’s presence in the Eucharist to all.

DISCERNMENT

Those selected to be Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to be fully initiated members of the community, both male and female, of sufficient age and maturity, and of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Our parish also calls on some EMHC to take Communion to the sick and homebound; those persons selected for this ministry should possess the maturity necessary to minister in these sometimes difficult situations, as well as having full certification by Virtus.

For those discerning to serve in the public liturgical ministry of the Church, faith must be supported by visible signs. To this end, the following qualifications are employed to assist those discerning to take on this ministry:

1. Basic human wholeness
2. Manifestation of the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity)
3. Manifestation of the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance)
4. A positive sense of Church
5. A humble spirit & willingness to be formed in the ministry of the Church
6. An abiding reverence for the presence of Christ in the eucharistic bread and wine and in the assembly of the faithful

Finally, ministers who bring Communion to the sick or homebound are to comply with the prescribed Virtus background check, training and certification for ministry to children and

vulnerable adults. These requirements have been put into place for the safety and protection of both the sick person as well as the minister.

TRAINING AND ONGOING FORMATION

Preparation for this ministry includes:

1. Formal instruction which includes elements on ministry, Eucharist, local customs and general guidelines.
2. Instruction about our local parish scheduling system, team expectations, responsibilities, and the opportunity to pray and share with others in the ministry.

LENGTH OF SERVICE

Since ministry is a call both from God and the community in which it is exercised, it is appropriate that choices of ministry and term of service should be mutually agreed upon by the individual and the parish. This allows the ministers the opportunity to evaluate their liturgical involvement and to change or include another ministry. As with all liturgical ministries, it is best for the individual and the parish if a person serves in only one ministry at any given liturgy as a way to encourage the involvement of a variety of persons in lay liturgical ministry.

REVERENCE AND ATTIRE

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should show a reverence for the Eucharist. That reverence is reflected in their demeanor at Mass i.e., (full, active and conscious participation at liturgy), attire, and the manner in which the Eucharist is handled.

A. Appearance

Neat and reverential appearance is in keeping with the minister's role and belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The minister's attire and fashion should not detract from that role. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should see to it that hands are clean. Also, refrain from using strong cologne, perfume or aftershave because some people have sensitivities to these scents and because these fragrances often remain on one's hands and can be transferred to the

Eucharist. It is recommended that the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion do not wear any special liturgical garb or distinctive symbols.

B. Before the Liturgy

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should arrive and check in with the Sacristan at least 15 minutes before the liturgy begins. Careful handling of the Eucharistic bread and wine is important. Eucharistic bread left over after the Communion Rite is to be reverently returned to the altar and any Precious Blood left over from the Communion Rite should be consumed at the end of that rite at the credence table along with the purification of the vessel.

After preparation for this ministry is completed, formal commissioning of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion takes place at a parish Sunday liturgy. An “Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion” can be found in the BOOK OF BLESSINGS, chapter 63.

Finally, it is recommended that the EMHC sit with the assembly, though they are part of the opening and closing processions. It is a powerful sign of unity seeing them come from the assembly and returning to it after having served.

C. Procedures for Distribution

According to the document “Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America” (NDRHC), the priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon or other concelebrants, breaks the eucharistic bread as the Lamb of God is sung or recited. At the same time, other ciboria needed for the distribution of Communion are brought to the altar. The priest places the consecrated bread into the ciboria for distribution. In order to expedite this process, the presider may call upon the assistance of deacons or concelebrating priests. This is usually carried out at the altar, so that the sharing of all from the one bread and one cup is signified. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar as the priest receives Communion and wait to step up until the priest and/or priest concelebrants have concluded Communion. After the EMHC have assembled, he distributes Communion to them and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of

Holy Communion to the people. The deacon receives Holy Communion in the same manner as do lay ministers and does not selfcommunicate Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. Once the EMHC have received Communion, the presider hands the vessels containing the Body and Blood of Christ to the deacon and the extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. Also, the deacon may assist the presider in handing the vessels to the EMHC. The presider and other ministers go to their assigned stations for distribution of Communion. All who present themselves should be given Communion. Even if there is a question of propriety or scandal, the minister should offer Communion and speak to the pastor after Mass. When Communion is offered under both kinds, the cup is always to be administered by an ordinary (deacon or priest) or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. The reception of the cup by the communicants is their personal choice.

D. Gesture before Receiving Communion

The GIRM 2002 indicates that the faithful are to make a sign of reverence before receiving Communion. The Bishops' Conference of the United States has determined that the faithful should bow their head before receiving Communion (GIRM 2002, no. 160). This gesture expresses our reverence and honor to Christ who comes to us as spiritual food.

1. When receiving Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister.
2. When Communion is received under both kinds, the sign of reverence is also made before receiving the Precious Blood.

E. Giving the Bread: "The Body of Christ"

In giving Communion, the minister holds a host or a piece of the eucharistic bread slightly above the vessel, looks at the communicant and says in a clear voice: "The Body of Christ." The communicant responds: "Amen." The minister then gives Communion, respecting the option of the communicant to receive either in the palm of the hand or on the tongue (GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-287). The act of communion and eye contact is of great importance in this action therefore, the EMHC is not to raise or elevate the host between the faces of the EMHC and the communicant but only slightly above the vessel.

F. Giving the Cup: “The Blood of Christ”

In administering the cup, the minister holds the cup up slightly, without raising or elevating the cup and says in a clear voice while looking at the communicant: “The Blood of Christ.” The communicant responds: “Amen.” The communicant takes it entirely into his/her hands, drinks from it and returns it to the minister. Then the minister wipes the rim of the cup with the purificator, gives the cup a quarter turn, and offers it to the next communicant (GIRM 2002, nos. 161, 284-287; NDRHC, nos. 43 & 45). It is the choice of the communicant, not the minister, to receive from the cup (NDRHC, no. 46). Although described in the Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America (NDRHC, no. 49), the practice of receiving Communion by intinction is discouraged. This practice seems to stand in contrast with Jesus’ command to “take and drink” (GIRM 2002, no. 281). The practice of receiving Communion by intinction also limits one’s capacity for receiving Communion in the hand. The communicant, including the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, is never allowed to selfcommunicate, even by means of intinction. Communion under either form, bread and/or wine, must always be given by a minister of Communion (NDRHC, no. 50).

(Note: For the faithful who desire to receive communion by “intinction”, when presenting themselves to the EMHC of the cup while holding the “Precious Body” for “intinction”, simply take the “host” with your fingers, dip the “host” in the cup, and with the invitation “The Blood of Christ”, offer Holy Communion directly on the tongue of the communicant).

The invitation, “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ,” must not be narrowed or expanded as it weakens the communicant’s response. “Amen” (“I believe”) is an affirmation or profession of faith in three realities:

- the presence of Christ in the assembly;
- the presence of Christ in the communicant;
- the presence of Christ under the forms of bread and wine.

Changing the invitation restricts the communicant’s affirmation of all three. Initiated children are encouraged to receive Communion under both kinds. Also, they should take direction from their parents about receiving the Precious Blood from the cup.

G. Purification of Sacred Vessels

After the distribution of Communion, any remaining Eucharistic bread or hosts are to be consumed or reserved in the tabernacle (NDRHC, no. 51 and the Code of Canon Law, no. 939). Also, if there is any remaining Precious Blood, the priest, deacon and/or EMHC consume what remains (GIRM 2002, no. 182; NDRHC, no. 52). The reverence due to the Precious Blood demands that it be fully consumed after Communion is completed and never be poured into the ground or the sacrarium (NDRHC, no. 55). The chalice and other vessels used for the distribution of Communion may be taken to a credence table where they are cleansed. Provided the remaining consecrated bread has been consumed or reserved in the tabernacle and the remaining Precious Blood has been consumed, the vessels may be left at the credence table (suitably covered and on a corporal) and cleansed after Mass (GIRM 2002, no. 183; NDRHC, no. 53).

If an accident occurs . . . don't panic!

- With the Eucharistic Bread: The minister has several options. You may bring the dropped host to the altar and place it on the corporal to be consumed after communion, or you may hold the host in the same hand as the vessel. The host that is dropped is never to be replaced in the vessel, given to the next communicant, or consumed by the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at that time. When distribution is finished and the minister returns to the altar, then the host may be consumed or brought to the sacristy where it may be completely dissolved in a bowl of water, which is then poured into the special sink (sacrarium).
- With the Precious Blood: The minister should cover the spillage with a purificator, first asking the communicant to proceed to another minister of the cup. Clean up the space as best you can with the purificator. After Mass the area should be washed with a damp clean purificator. Clean (damp) towels should be used if the area is larger. The cloths are rinsed and then wrung into the sacrarium.

MINISTRY TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

When one member of the Body of Christ is unable to celebrate fully at Sunday liturgy due to sickness or advanced age, the entire community should be informed so that prayers and works of charity can be done on their behalf. The EMHC who feels called to minister to the sick becomes a vital link between the parish community and the member who is hospitalized or homebound.

The EMHC to the sick and homebound is at its core, a manifestation of empathy and compassion. It is important that ministers to the homebound be sensitive to the communicant's needs, i.e., spiritual, emotional, and material, as they may have to inform the parish staff if the person is in need of sacramental anointing, reconciliation or a pastoral visit, as well as maintain the confidentiality and dignity of the individual.

NOTE: All EMHC to the sick and homebound are to have level-two background screening, which includes the completion of Virtus Safe Environment Program and background checks. It is most desirable, that visits to the sick and homebound occur after a Sunday Mass so the important link between the Sunday parish celebration and the sick person is maintained. The same is true following a weekday celebration, provided the parish has enough ministers.

Bringing Communion to the Sick & 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.

4. 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.
5. Based on the person's strength/attentiveness, share with them the day's homily.
6. Have a cup of water ready if the person has difficulty swallowing.
7. 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. (Including parish registration if they are not already registered & always carry a blank registration for this purpose).
8. Graciously thank the person for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.
9. Consume any leftover hosts immediately after your visit. Please do not return unconsumed hosts to the tabernacle.

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 a plastic bag or other unsuitable container. Instead, use a pyx to carry the consecrated host.
5. Don't leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later date to see the sick person.

*Contact the parish office for further information about becoming an EMHC to the sick and homebound.