

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass

Liturgy Guides

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass

General Principles

In every celebration of the Eucharist, there should be a sufficient number of ministers of Holy Communion so that it may be distributed in a reverent and orderly manner. Bishops, priests and deacons distribute Holy Communion in virtue of their office as ordinary ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord.⁽¹⁾ When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, "the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the priest may also depute suitable faithful for this single occasion (GIRM 162)."

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should receive sufficient spiritual, theological, and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence. In all matters they should follow the guidance of the diocesan bishop (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America*, NDRHC, no. 28). When recourse is had to Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, especially in the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, their number should not be increased beyond what is required for the orderly and reverent distribution of the Body and Blood of the Lord. In all matters such Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should follow the guidance of the diocesan bishop (IBID).

All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread or wine. Should there be any mishap—as when, for example, the consecrated wine is spilled from the chalice—then the affected "area . . . should be washed and the water poured into the *sacrarium* [*GIRM*, 280]." (NDRHC, 29).

Liturgy of the Eucharist

- As the *Agnus Dei* or *Lamb of God* is begun, the Bishop or priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon, and if necessary of concelebrating priests, breaks the eucharistic bread. Other empty ciboria or patens are then brought to the altar if this is necessary. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria or patens, if necessary, as required for the distribution of Holy Communion. If it is not possible to accomplish this distribution in a reasonable time, the celebrant may call upon the assistance of other deacons or concelebrating priests.
- If extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are required by pastoral need, they should not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion to the extraordinary ministers, assisted by the deacon, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people.
- All receive Holy Communion in the manner described by the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal*, whether priest concelebrants (cf. GIRM, nos. 159, 242, 243, 246), deacons (cf. GIRM, nos. 182, 244, 246), or Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (cf. GIRM, no. 284). Neither deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. 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. (NDRHC, 39; GIRM, 160).
- After all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have received the Eucharist, the bishop or priest celebrant reverently hands vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the deacons or extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. The deacon may assist the priest in handing the vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. (NDRHC, 40).
- 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. (Cf. GIRM, 161; 284-287).
- If the Eucharistic bread or some particle of it falls, it should be picked up reverently by the minister. The consecrated bread may be consumed or completely dissolved in water before being poured down the *sacrarium*.
- Should there be any mishap, for example, if the consecrated wine is spilled from the chalice, the area should be washed and the water poured into the *sacrarium*.
- In those instances when there remains more consecrated wine than was necessary, if needs dictate, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their cup of distribution with the permission of the diocesan bishop. The sacred vessels are to be purified by the priest, the deacon or an instituted acolyte. The amount of wine to be consecrated should be carefully measured before the celebration so that none remains afterward. It is strictly forbidden to pour the Precious Blood into the ground or into the *sacrarium*. (NDRHC, 51-55).
- Similarly, "consecrated hosts are to be reserved in a ciborium or vessel in sufficient quantity for the needs of the faithful; they are to be frequently renewed and the old hosts properly consumed" (*Code of Canon Law*, no. 939). *Burying hosts or consecrated Eucharistic bread is strictly forbidden*.

Notes

1. *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America* [NDRHC] (August, 2002), no. 26 and cf. GIRM no. 162 and NRHC, no. 28

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