

**A Handbook for
Extraordinary Ministers
Of The Eucharist**

A THEOLOGY OF LAY LITURGICAL MINISTRY

"But you are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt. 2:9).

All liturgical ministers are, first and foremost, members of the Body of Christ. Through their baptism they are the "holy people and royal priesthood" whose right and privilege it is to participate in the ministry of Christ. How the lay faithful exercise this ministry in the world varies, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been "conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the eucharist" (General Instruction Of The Roman Missal - GIRM, Introduction #5).

Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the "action of the whole Church" (GIRM, Introduction #5), everyone in the assembly has "an individual right and duty to contribute their participation" (GIRM #58). Some of the faithful are called to serve God's people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it need nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help you grow in a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, your ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve.

I. EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF THE EUCHARIST

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it and giving it to his disciples said, 'Take and eat; this is my body'" (Mt. 26:26).

Of the many ways the faithful participate in the celebration of the Mass, none is more vital than "sharing together in the Lord's table" (GIRM, # 62). So important is this sharing that the practice of taking the Eucharist to those unable to attend the celebration has existed in the Church since ancient times. The earliest "communion ministers", although never designated by this term, were ordinary Christians who carried the Eucharist to sick or imprisoned family and friends. Over the centuries, the practice of distributing Communion during Mass and carrying it to the sick became the sole responsibility of ordained ministers, but the need for all Christians to share in the Eucharist never diminished. In 1973, so that the faithful might have greater access to Holy Communion and share more fully in the fruits of the Mass, Pope Paul VI, in the instruction "Immensae Caritatis", once again extended to the lay faithful permission to assist priests in distributing Holy Communion.

Bishops, priests and deacons are the usual or "ordinary" ministers of communion since this is an intrinsic part of their role. The lay faithful are "extraordinary" ministers since they function only when recommended by their pastors and designated by the bishop. This is a ministry of both invitation and challenge, for when we place the bread or cup into the outstretched hands of our assemblies, we not only invite them to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, we challenge them to become it as well.

Those who minister communion are likewise invited and challenged. We are invited to serve the Body of Christ at the eucharistic table and challenged to build up the Body through the way we live. Our love for the Eucharist should be evident in a mature and lively faith which enables us to bring Christ to all we meet long after the liturgy has ended.

II. TRAINING AND FORMATION

The lay faithful who are called to ministry have the right to adequate training from their parish communities before being assigned to service in the assembly. Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist (EME's) require training in the details of how communion is distributed in the liturgical space where they will serve. Equally important is on-going formation that develops skills, deepens understanding of the Eucharist and encourages spiritual growth. The Office of Liturgy has resources to assist parishes with the important tasks of training and formation.

Training for EME's includes:

- Learning the specifics of the liturgical space such as the names and location of the sacred vessels and cloths used during the distribution of Communion.
- Learning proper reverence for the eucharistic elements.
- Learning when to come forward, where to stand and what to say while ministering the bread and cup.
- Learning how and when reserved hosts are taken to or from the tabernacle.
- Learning how and when the sacred vessels are cleaned after communion.
- Practicing to carry out these responsibilities with confidence and dignity.

On-going formation includes opportunities for:

- Understanding the importance of symbol and ritual in Catholic worship.
- Deepening knowledge of the theology and structure of the Mass.
- Deepening understanding of the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity and service.
- Deepening appreciation for the many modes of Christ's presence within the Christian community.
- Prayerful reflection on the Sunday readings.
- Scripture study to foster a greater love for God's word.
- Parish gatherings for prayer, reflection and fellowship on a regular basis throughout the liturgical year.

III. COMMISSIONING

EME's are to be fully initiated Catholics, at least 16 years of age, who manifest their love for the Eucharist by participating in the sacramental life of the Church and the activities of their parish. Qualified persons who have been discerned as candidates for this ministry must receive an endorsement from the bishop. The pastor is to forward the names of these people to the chancery asking that they be named as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. EME's are commissioned to function within their own parish for a period of three years. The commission expires after three years or if the person moves away from the parish. The commission may be renewed by again requesting endorsement from the bishop. Commissioning should take place during a parish celebration according to the rite provided in the *Book of Blessings*.

III. PREPARATION

Those who exercise a liturgical ministry are expected to develop their ministerial skills by taking advantage of the training and formation opportunities offered by their parish or through the Office of Liturgy. In addition, they have a serious responsibility to prepare in a more immediate way for the liturgies at which they will serve.

For EME's this more immediate preparation includes:

- Arriving in enough time to become calm and unhurried before the liturgy and to check for any changes or special instructions.
- Dressing in a way that reflects the importance and dignity of this ministry.
- Serving when scheduled and notifying a responsible authority and/or arranging for a substitute when not available.

IV. EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

EME's also carry communion to the sick or homebound. Any one who regularly performs this aspect of the ministry likewise receives training, commissioning and on-going formation. To establish the connection between the Sunday assembly and those members who are absent, EME's ideally are sent to take communion to the sick and homebound directly from the Sunday celebration.

V. DURING THE LITURGY

The Entrance Procession

- In many parishes EME's simply sit with the assembly until it is time to distribute communion. In some parishes EME's walk in the entrance procession, then take their seats in the assembly. Whatever the parish practice, it is important that the ministers know and follow it.

The Communion Rite

- In most parishes EME's approach the altar after exchanging the sign of peace with those around them. They may assist the priest (and/or deacon) in breaking and distributing the consecrated bread, and pouring the consecrated wine, into additional vessels. Otherwise, they should stand near the altar quietly and reverently.
- Since it is highly desirable that the assembly "receive the Lord's body from the hosts consecrated at the same Mass" (GIRM # 56), using the reserved sacrament in the tabernacle should be the exception, not the rule.
- How the EME's receive communion varies from parish to parish, but it is recommended that they receive communion before ministering to the assembly. In this way, they more visibly fulfill the Lord's command to "take, eat and give."
- The Lord's Body and Blood are never left on the altar for communicants to take themselves, nor are they passed from one communicant to another.
- After moving to their designated stations, EME's make eye contact with each person coming forward to receive communion. The consecrated host is held up for the person to see and the EME clearly says, "The Body of Christ". The communicant responds, "Amen". The host is placed firmly in the hand or on the tongue of the communicant. Whether to receive in the hand or on the tongue is the choice of the person receiving.
- The cup of consecrated wine is likewise held for the person to see while the EME says clearly, "The Blood of Christ". Again the response is "Amen." The EME places the cup entirely in the hands of the communicant. After the communicant has received, the EME takes the cup, wipes both sides of the rim with the purificator, turns the cup slightly and presents it to the next person.
- Since sharing in a common cup is a fuller sign of the unity which the Eucharist creates among Christians, separate cups for individual communicants are not used in the Roman Rite. Intinction (dipping the host) or the use of a straw or a spoon are likewise not customary in the dioceses of the United States (GIRM, Appendix #240).
- Since communion under both kinds is a fuller sacramental sign, both bread and wine should ordinarily be offered.
- The words used in presenting the host or the cup are not to be changed or adapted in any way, even by the addition of personal names.
- Since during the liturgy "all should do only, but all of, those parts that belong to them in virtue of their place within the people of God" (GIRM #5), EME's should not perform multiple ministries during the same celebration.

After Communion

- When the assembly has finished receiving, the EME's set the sacred vessels in their proper place, usually a credence table to the side of the altar.
- Any remaining hosts should be put in one container and brought to the tabernacle or a side table.
- Remaining consecrated wine should be reverently and unobtrusively consumed by the EME's.
- When all is finished, the EME's return to their seats and join the assembly in the post-communion silence and the concluding rites.
- After Mass, EME's may be asked to clean and put away the vessels for the next liturgy.

VI. GLOSSARY

Alb	A long white robe worn over regular clothing that can be used by all liturgical ministers.
Ambo	A sacred place from which the word of God is proclaimed. It is reserved for the readings, the psalm, and the Easter Proclamation (Exsultet), but may also be used for the homily and general intercessions.
Assembly	The people of God gathered for prayer and worship.
Book of the Gospels	The book containing the Gospels that is carried in procession each Sunday and from which the priest or deacon proclaims the Gospel.
Chalice	The cup used to hold the wine for consecration during Mass.
Corporal	A small white cloth placed on top of the altar cloth to hold the sacred vessels used for the Eucharist.
Ciborium	A covered bowl used to hold consecrated hosts after Mass.
Credence Table	A small table placed to the side of the altar used to hold items used during Mass.
Lectionary	The book containing the scripture readings used on Sundays and the readings for Mass during the week.
Liturgical Minister	Someone who serves in a special role during a liturgical celebration.
Missal/Sacramentary	The book containing the prayers used by the priest during Mass.
Parts of the Mass	<p>The Mass is divided into four main parts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introductory Rites - The parts of the Mass before the scripture reading, from the entrance song through the opening prayer.• Liturgy of the Word - From the first reading through the prayer of the faithful.• Liturgy of the Eucharist - From the preparation of the gifts through the prayer after communion.• Concluding Rite - The priest's greeting and blessing and the dismissal of the assembly.
Purificator	A clean cloth used for wiping the chalice during communion and cleaning it after Mass.

Pyx A small covered container used to carry consecrated hosts to the sick.

Sanctuary The sacred space around the altar usually set apart in some way from the rest of the church building.

VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Bernardin, Cardinal Joseph. *Guide For The Assembly*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

Glendinning, Barry. *Preparing the Eucharistic Table*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1996.

Mahoney, Cardinal Roger. *Gather Faithfully Together: A Guide For Sunday Mass*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

Tufano, Victoria M. *Guide For Ministers Of Communion*. Chicago, Illinois: Liturgy Training Publications, 1999.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This handbook has been prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It defines your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2nd.edition - 1975) the current directives of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

Consultation and study of the *Institutio Generalis Romani 2000* is in progress. the actual text of the new Roman General Instruction cannot be changed, however, emendations can be made for its application in the United States. While the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy continues its work, Bishop Griffin has directed that no changes be made to current liturgical practice within our diocese (protocol #09/00).

We are committed to supporting you in this ministry and in your desire to grow in your understanding of the liturgy you serve. It is our hope that this handbook will be the beginning of a dialogue between liturgical ministers that encourages us to reflect upon why we do what we do and how to enter into "full, active, conscious" participation in the liturgy through the ministry to which we have been called.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to:

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Peace and all good!

A MINISTER'S PRAYER

(Adapted from an ancient Celtic prayer attributed to St. Patrick).

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,
Christ in the eye that sees me,
Christ in the ear that hears me.