



# **Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

## **Archdiocese of San Antonio**

### **Introduction**

*“The proof of his boundless charity that Christ the Lord left to his Bride the Church, namely, the inexpressible and supreme gift of the Eucharist, requires us to deepen our appreciation of this great mystery and to share ever more fully in its saving power. ... The new conditions of the present seem to demand that, without prejudice to the supreme reverence due to so great a sacrament, access to communion be made easier, so that by sharing more fully in the effects of the sacrifice of the Mass, the faithful may more willingly and intensely give themselves to God and to the good of the Church and of all humanity”. Immensae Caritatis, 1973, Introduction*

With these words, the Church opens her instruction which permits lay men and women to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. This privilege and duty extend from the Church's desire to make the Eucharist more easily available to the faithful.

In March of 1971, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops received permission from the Vatican to introduce the practice of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the United States and soon after this liturgical practice was introduced in the Archdiocese of San Antonio. Since that time, the service of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese has been extended to include offering Holy Communion to the sick in their homes and in healthcare facilities, as well as to those incarcerated in prisons. We are truly grateful for those who serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

Effective June 11, 2023, The Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.

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**I.**  
**Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**  
**Selection and Formation**

1. Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are bishops, priests, or deacons.
2. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist priests and deacons in administering Holy Communion. They may not replace them, except on those occasions when the ordinary minister is impeded from administering Holy Communion due to ill health, advanced age, or other pressing pastoral obligations.
3. It is the responsibility of pastors, chaplains, and religious superiors, within their respective jurisdictions, to evaluate the need for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and to identify worthy candidates for this service.
4. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may be appointed in parishes, religious houses, and chaplaincies and should correspond to genuine pastoral need where ordinary ministers are not available or insufficient in number:
  - a. To facilitate the distribution of Holy Communion within Mass when there is a large number of communicants:
  - b. To allow for a more frequent, even daily, administration of Holy Communion outside of Mass to those impeded from, or unable, to attend Mass, due to sickness or physical weakness or incarceration.
5. The number should not be so few as to unduly burden any one minister, yet sufficient enough to administer the Sacrament with grace and dignity at every Sunday and Holy Day Liturgy, or even daily Mass, if the number of communicants calls for it. As the number of Communicants of the Precious Blood increases, it is recommended that for every minister of the Body of Christ, there be two ministers of the Precious Blood.
6. To serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion persons must:
  - a) Be practicing Catholics, distinguished in their Christian life, faith, and morals;
  - b) Be at least 17 years old, unless a pastor deems an earlier age is appropriate for an adolescent exhibiting a deep understanding, reverence, and devotion to the Eucharist;
  - c) Have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist;
  - d) Demonstrate a deep reverence for and devotion to the Holy Eucharist;
  - e) Possess the requisite abilities and temperament to carry out their assigned duties.
7. Care is to be taken that the selection of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion reflects the diversity of the community to which they will minister. Candidates may be lay men or women or those in consecrated life.

8. The pastor, chaplain or religious superior should interview candidates prior to presenting them for recommendation to the Archbishop. This consultation should provide the candidates with the opportunity to express their belief in the Eucharist and their understanding of their role as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Inquiry should be made regarding the candidates' attitude toward prayer and regular participation in the life of the parish community.
9. Whether for liturgical service or service outside the parish setting and prior to commissioning as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, candidates are strongly encouraged to complete the archdiocesan Parish Ministry Formation Program provided by the Institute for Lay Ecclesial Ministry and Service or a program of formation presented by the parish or deanery. This program provides theological and spiritual formation, as well as training in practical and liturgical skills. Alternatively, the Archdiocesan Office of Worship may be contacted for assistance.
10. Once candidates have been selected and instructed, the pastor will submit their names to the Office of the Chancellor, who will, in the name of the Archbishop, appoint them as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The submission is made electronically on an online form found at the webpage for the Chancellor's Office: <https://archsa.org/wp-content/uploads/EMHC-Request-Form-2023.pdf>
11. Before assuming their duties, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be commissioned according to the rite found in the *Book of Blessings, Chapter 63*. This should occur at a Sunday Mass or other public liturgical event.
12. The appointment for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is for three years, effective from the time of commissioning. The appointment is renewable, but application must again be made to the Archbishop by the pastor, chaplain, or religious superior, through the Office of the Chancellor. Pastors, chaplains, and religious superiors are encouraged to promote a broad sharing of this ministry among the faithful under their care. It is the responsibility of the pastor to determine at what intervals people are invited, formed, and commissioned for service. While this is normally done once a year, nothing precludes admitting someone at other times.
13. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are designated for service in their own parish or specified institution, and therefore are not authorized to exercise this ministry in other parishes or institutions. For hospitals, jails, prisons, nursing care facilities, and private homes, see Section 5 at the end of this document.
14. Pastors, chaplains, and religious superiors *should confirm Sunday Mass attendance periodically*, and review the effectiveness of their Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, at least on an annual basis, and be diligent in providing on-going

formation to deepen the ministers' eucharistic devotion and liturgical spirituality. Eucharistic devotion, including Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, should normally be a part of such ongoing formation.

15. When serving, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should always be dressed in a manner consistent with the dignity of their role. A neat and modest appearance and reverential deportment are always essential. A pastor may decide to provide written and more explicit guidelines in this regard which should be sent to the Chancellor's office for review.
16. At the time of the selection of candidates, during the formation and training programs, at the ceremony of commissioning as well as at other opportune moments, priests should make every effort to instruct the people under their care about the nature of this ministry and the importance of the Eucharist in the life of the Church. (See *Ecclesia de Eucharistia: On the Eucharist In Its Relationship to the Church*, Pope John Paul II, Holy Thursday, 2003)

## II.

### General Norms

#### **Procedures for the Distribution of Holy Communion at Mass by Extraordinary Ministers**

17. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are normally seated in the assembly, until the time when they approach the altar to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. They should not form a part of the entrance procession or recessional. However, they should be seated in a location close to the sanctuary, so as to facilitate their ministry. No special vesture is necessary for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. However, they should be dressed in a dignified manner which befits their service. "It is never licit for laypersons to assume the role or the vesture of a Priest or a Deacon or other clothing similar to such vesture" (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 153).
18. If a large number of hosts are needed at a given Mass, some of these may be prepared prior to Mass in various ciboria and, *during the preparation of gifts*, they are placed on the altar for consecration in order that the Fraction Rite is not unduly prolonged. At the Fraction Rite, which is accompanied by a sung or recited *Lamb of God*, the Bishop or priest alone breaks the Sacred Host. Empty ciboria or patens, if necessary, are then brought to the altar by acolyte, deacon or servers. The priest, who may be assisted by a deacon, places the individual consecrated Hosts in the ciboria for distribution.
19. The wine to be consecrated for all communicants is to be poured into the smaller chalices at the time of the preparation of the gifts. This may also be done before Mass in the sacristy, and a tray with the prepared vessels placed on a credence table until the

time of the preparation of the gifts when the chalices are moved to the altar. Only a priest or deacon pours a small amount of water into the main chalice.

The amount of wine to be consecrated should be carefully determined and poured before the celebration so that none remains afterward. In those instances when there remains more consecrated wine than was necessary, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese of San Antonio may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their cup of distribution. It is strictly forbidden to pour the Precious Blood into the ground or into a sacrarium (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, NDRHC, 51-55*)

20. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion approach the altar after the priest receives Communion. After the priest has concluded his own Communion, he distributes Communion first to the Deacon, if one is present, then to the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, assisted by the Deacon. They receive Communion before ministering to the faithful. When all the ministers have received, he then reverently hands the vessels containing the Body and Blood of the Lord to the Deacons or Extraordinary Ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion to the people. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not take the sacred vessels from the altar themselves but are to be handed them by the priest or deacon. Waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful is not in accord with liturgical law.
21. After receiving the sacred species, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, with the utmost dignity and reverence, proceed to their Communion stations.
22. When distributing the Sacred Hosts, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion holds up the consecrated Host as each communicant approaches and, addressing the communicant, says, "The Body of Christ." When the communicant responds "Amen," the minister places the Host on the communicant's tongue or in the communicant's hand. No other words or names should be added, for either the Body or Blood of Christ, and the formula should not be edited in any way. (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 161; 284-287)  
  
N.B.: The decision to receive the host on the tongue or in the hand is made by the communicant, and not the minister (GIRM, 161) "However, special care should be taken to ensure that the Host is consumed by the communicant in the presence of the minister, so that no one goes away carrying the Eucharistic species in his or her hand" (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 92)
23. When distributing the Precious Blood, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion holds up the chalice filled with the Precious Blood as each communicant approaches and, addressing the communicant, says, "The Blood of Christ." When the

communicant responds “Amen,” the minister hands the chalice to the communicant. After each communicant has consumed the Precious Blood, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion wipes both sides of the rim of the chalice with a purificator. The minister then turns the chalice slightly after each communicant has received the Precious Blood. Only purificators made of cloth may be used.

24. The communicant, including the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, is not allowed to self-communicate, even by means of intinction, that is, by dipping the Host into the Chalice.
25. While distributing Communion, if a Host, or any particle of a Host, is dropped, the minister should reverently pick it up and consume it. If it is not immediately consumed, it may be set aside to later be completely dissolved in water before being poured down a sacrarium.
26. If any of the Precious Blood should spill, the minister should use the purificator to wipe up the spill. A second purificator is placed on the floor to mark the spot of the spill. After Mass, the area where the spill occurred should be washed and the water poured into the sacrarium. After use, purificators should always be rinsed in a sacrarium before being laundered.
27. After Communion, the Sacred Hosts that remain are brought to the altar to be either returned to the tabernacle by the priest or deacon. Care should be taken that any fragments of the Hosts remaining on the corporal or in the sacred vessels after Communion be reverently consumed. N.B. “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 consecrated Hosts is forbidden.
28. The reverence due to the Precious Blood of the Lord requires that it be fully consumed immediately after Communion is completed and never poured on the ground or into the sacrarium. It may not be reserved in the Tabernacle. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may assist the priest and deacon in consuming the Precious Blood.
29. Once the Hosts have been returned to the tabernacle for reservation, the ministers should then return to their place in the congregation.
30. The sacred vessels should be purified either at the altar or at a side table in the sanctuary. It is permissible to leave the sacred vessels suitably covered at the side table on a corporal, to be purified *after Communion* or immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people. They may also be purified in the sacristy after Mass by the deacon, acolyte, or priest.



31. After Mass the vessels are to be moved to the sacristy to be washed and dried thoroughly to be ready for the next liturgy. Please note: Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may assist with the task of cleaning (i.e., washing and drying) the sacred vessels but not in their purification.

### **III.**

#### **The Blessing of Communicants Unable to Receive Holy Communion**

32. The faithful who are unable to receive Holy Communion often approach the Communion line with their arms crossed over their chest indicating their desire to receive a blessing. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not to offer a blessing, in the same manner as a priest or a deacon and should not physically touch the person, according to a letter issued by the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (Protocol No. 930/08/L). As a more appropriate Act of Spiritual Communion, and to establish consistency, it is strongly recommended that the priest, deacon, and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, use the following words, normally without a gesture: “*Receive Our Lord Jesus Christ into your heart*”. While the faithful may continue to come in the Communion line for a blessing, celebrants are strongly asked not to encourage this practice. Please refer to the Guidelines for the Reception of Holy Communion, issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for further guidance. (For the complete text: [The Reception of Holy Communion at Mass | USCCB](#))

### **IV.**

#### **Temporary Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion**

33. While formal mandating after proper preparation is the normal way in which a person becomes an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, it is permissible for a priest to appoint such a minister to serve on a single occasion, when there is real necessity. Necessity in this instance should be understood as a situation which arises suddenly (e.g., larger number of people than usual at a given Mass and no formally mandated Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion present). It does not extend to situations in which there is simply a desire to allow individuals who have not been mandated to exercise this ministry at a specific ceremony (e.g., a bride and groom at their wedding; family members at a funeral). In these and other similar instances when Extraordinary Ministers must be used, persons who have been mandated for that institution and commissioned by the normal process should be employed.

When there is a need for a temporary commissioning, the person should be publicly commissioned according to the Rite found in Appendix III of the *Roman Missal*. Ministers commissioned in this way may serve only on the occasion on which they have been commissioned. It should be made clear to them that this commission is for this one occasion only.

## V. Distribution of Holy Communion Outside of a Parish Setting

34. Special care must be exercised in the choice of those candidates who will take Holy Communion to the sick. In addition to meeting the qualifications listed at no. 6 in section I, they must be persons who will minister to the sick and the aged in a compassionate and understanding manner, always conscious of the serious obligation to respect the confidence of those to whom they minister.
35. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who take Holy Communion to those outside of a parish setting (the sick and homebound) are extensions of the ministry of the parish. They should receive approval from their pastor and should be trained for the special requirements of this ministry. Extraordinary Ministers who bring Holy Communion to persons in hospitals, prisons, jails, nursing care facilities, and private homes, must have complied with all Archdiocese of San Antonio safe environment training, particularly the Vulnerable Adults Training (VIRTUS). For ministers visiting hospitals and correctional facilities, they must submit a Volunteer Application, Criminal Background check, and a letter of Good Standing from his/her pastor.
36. In administering Holy Communion to the sick, Extraordinary Ministers are to follow exactly the rite of *Administration of Holy Communion to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister* that is found in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, the ritual book. Other resources include *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* (Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1983), and *Communion of the Sick* (Liturgical Press, 1984).
37. The Eucharist that is taken to the sick is to be carried in a pyx, which should be placed in a burse, if possible, and carried on the person of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion with reverence. An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, while bearing the Eucharist, should, as a rule, maintain silence, pray, and be especially mindful of the sacred responsibility that has been entrusted to them.
38. A pyx should always be blessed before being used for the first time. It should be kept in a safe and respectful place when not in use. Upon returning home, the Communion Minister should properly purify their pyx by putting a small amount of water in the pyx and consuming the water used for purification. The pyx should then be thoroughly dried.
39. Errands such as shopping are not to be done by the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion while bearing the Blessed Sacrament, nor is the Eucharist ever to be reserved in the house of the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for distribution at another time. The Eucharist must be borne directly from the parish to the sick without interruption.

40. Visitation of the sick should be so planned that, even when an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion takes Holy Communion to the sick more frequently, a priest will visit the sick and be available for the Sacrament of Penance.
41. Visitation of the sick should be so planned that, even when an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion takes Holy Communion to the sick more frequently, a priest will visit the sick and be available for the Sacrament of Penance, or the Anointing of the Sick, where appropriate.
42. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion serving in nursing homes and correctional facilities must abide by volunteer procedures provided by the facilities and institutions at which they will serve. This pertains to: volunteer onboarding and clearance, health checks, volunteer processes and protocols of the institution, and additional in-service or training provided by the hospital, health care facility, or correctional facility.
43. In correctional facilities, inmates who meet the *Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* may be selected to distribute Holy Communion within a Mass or Communion Service. The Director of Criminal Justice Ministry will collaborate with Criminal Justice Ministry leaders and the Archdiocesan priest who ministers to the facility to invite and train members of the faithful. Before assuming their duties, inmates who qualify will be commissioned according to the rite found in the Book of Blessings, Chapter 63.
44. If a minister has not been trained or commissioned from a parish but would like to serve in hospital ministry, he/she must follow the process of submitting to the Archdiocese a Volunteer Application, Criminal Background Check, and Letter of Good Standing from his/her pastor. At that time, training will be provided by the Archdiocesan Director of Hospital Ministry and an appointment to the role of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion will be submitted to the Chancellor's Office.
45. Only those who have been trained and commissioned (or appointed) by the Archdiocese of San Antonio may provide Holy Communion to Catholic individuals upon request. Non-Catholic employed chaplains or ministers of other faith denominations may not administer Holy Communion to Catholic individuals who have requested to receive it.
46. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should provide Holy Communion to any baptized Catholic. It is not the role of the minister to deny someone Holy Communion, therefore blocking the grace of the Sacrament for those who are suffering, vulnerable, and potentially in the end stages of life.

## VI. Glossary of Terms

**BURSE** – a pouch with a cord to be worn around the neck that holds the pyx with consecrated hosts when traveling to distribute Communion to the homebound or those in hospitals or nursing homes.

**CELIAC SPRUE** – a disease where a person, to varying degrees, cannot ingest gluten found in wheat flour without becoming ill.

**CHALICE** – also referred to as the cup, is used to hold the consecrated wine of the Eucharist (the Blood of Christ).

**CIBORIUM** – a metal container (usually having a cover) used to hold the consecrated hosts. It has a variety of forms from a bowl shape to a goblet-like appearance similar to the chalice. (*plural-ciboria*)

**COMMISSION** – the public act of installing and blessing a member of the community for a particular ministry of service.

**COMMUNICANT** – the person who receives Holy Communion

**CREDENCE TABLE** – A small table or shelf in the wall at one side of the altar. On it are usually placed the cruets, basin, and finger towel. The chalice (or cups), corporals, purificators, and extra ciboria for the Mass may also be placed there.

**EUCCHARIST** – comes from a Greek word meaning “to give thanks”. Another name for the Mass or the consecrated bread and wine.

**EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION** – a non-ordained person who is commissioned to distribute Holy Communion for a single or multiple occasions.

**HOST** – the round wafer that becomes the consecrated bread of the Eucharist (the Body of Christ).

**INTINCTION** – the practice of partly dipping the consecrated bread, or *host*, into the consecrated wine before consumption by the communicant. This is only to be done by the priest in exceptional circumstances and never done by the communicant.

**LITURGY** – official public worship of the Church, of which Eucharist is first and foremost.

**LUNA** – the round glass case in which a consecrated host is kept so that it can be placed into the monstrance for Eucharistic Exposition.

**MONSTRANCE** – a vessel used to display the consecrated host for Eucharistic Adoration.

**ORDINARY MINISTER OF COMMUNION** – those who have received the sacrament of Holy Orders (bishop, priest, or deacon).

**PASCHAL SACRIFICE** – Christ offering himself on the cross for the salvation of the world. Based on our Jewish heritage, Christ, by sacrificing himself on the cross, becomes our “Passover” (Pasch) Lamb and frees us from the bondage of sin and death.

**PATEN** – a saucer like dish that holds the round wafer that becomes the consecrated bread of the Eucharist (the Body of Christ). May appear similar to bowl-like ciboria but not as deep.

**PURIFICATOR** – a small piece of white linen, usually marked with a cross in the center, used to wipe the lip of the chalice or cups during the distribution of the Precious Blood.

**PURIFICATION** – the act of pouring water into the sacred vessels (paten, ciborium, chalice) to cleanse them of tiny particles of the host or remaining Precious Blood. That liquid is then consumed and a purificator used to wipe the vessels dry.

**PYX** – any metal box or vessel used to carry hosts on visitation to the homebound, hospitals, nursing homes, or prisons.

**SACRARIUM** – a special sink in the sacristy with pipes that drain directly into the ground.

**SACRISTAN** – a person who handles the preparations of vessels, linens, books, and other liturgical items before Mass. He or she may oversee the attendance of all liturgical ministers scheduled and may also communicate any special notices or instructions to these ministers before Mass.

**SPECIES** – usually referring to consecrated host (Body of Christ) and the consecrated wine (Blood of Christ) given at Holy Communion.

**TABERNACLE** – A cupboard or boxlike receptacle, usually locked, for the exclusive reservation of the Blessed Sacrament. A lit sanctuary lamp is usually located nearby indicating that the Blessed Sacrament is reserved **inside**.