

Frequently Asked Questions on Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

1. Are Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion really necessary?

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist in the reverent and orderly distribution of Holy Communion “when the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it” (Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds, 28). Their ministry is of great importance as it allows for Holy Communion to be received under both kinds, for the reception of Holy Communion to be a communal action, and allows for Holy Communion to be brought more readily to the sick and homebound.

2. Who appoints Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion?

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are delegated by the archbishop upon the recommendation of their pastor and the completion of the basic formation workshop conducted by the Office of Worship. Although priests may depute persons of good Christian reputation to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for a single occasion (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 162), it is the diocesan Bishop who is responsible for this ministry. At all times, EMHC are to follow the directions of their pastor and the archbishop.

3. Who regulates the ministry of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion?

The pastor of the parish has the responsibility of caring for the Eucharist in the parish. The laity and religious, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, share in this ministry at the service of the pastor. The pastor alone makes decisions on:

- who may serve as an EMHC
- when the service of an EMHC is no longer required
- to whom the Blessed Sacrament may be brought
- who may have access to the tabernacle
- particular practices in parish liturgies

Extraordinary Ministers are not to determine for themselves who may receive the Eucharist or to whom it can be brought outside of Mass. The Eucharist may not be brought to the sick or homebound (including family members) without permission from the pastor. If a person seeking to receive Communion is not a member of the parish, the pastor must first seek permission from that individual’s pastor before fulfilling the request. This is to ensure full sacramental care is provided to that person.

4. Can persons with disabilities serve as EMHCs?

Persons with disabilities may serve as EMHCs with the approval of the pastor. Accommodations should be made when possible, however, certain disabilities may preclude an individual from serving in this particular ministry as safeguarding the Blessed Sacrament is an essential element here. The determination on such matters is to be left to the individual pastor. Questions or advice regarding individual situations should be directed to the Office of Worship.

5. What preparations should one make prior to serving as an EMHC?

As a minister in the liturgy, one should dress appropriately for such service to God. The EMHC should also make sure to wash their hands before distributing the Blessed Sacrament. It is recommended to wash hands prior to Mass, whether at home or in the sacristy, with soap and water. The anti-bacterial gels/hand-sanitizers are not recommended as some people have reactions to these products.

6. What do I do if I drop a Host or spill the Precious Blood?

The first thing to remember is that it is necessary not to rush when distributing Holy Communion. Take time with each communicant so that it can be a prayerful encounter.

If a Host or part of a Host falls, pick it up immediately and consume it. If it cannot be consumed, it is to be completely dissolved in water before being poured down the sacrarium.

If some of the Precious Blood is spilled, immediately use your purificator to pick it up. Retrieve another purificator (yes, that means you may have to leave the communion station for a moment) and then continue ministering the remaining Precious Blood. After Mass, bring some water in a small basin and a purificator and wash the area. The water is then poured into the sacrarium. If a sacrarium is not available, the water is to be poured into the garden. If the Precious Blood falls onto a carpeted area, purificators are used to pick up as much as possible. A clean purificator is then used to cover the area until the Mass has been completed. The area should then be cleaned thoroughly and the water poured into the sacrarium.

7. May Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion bless those who are not receiving Holy Communion?

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are to not to bless the person, but should offer a very brief prayer of spiritual Communion, such as “May Christ be always in your heart” or “Receive Christ in your heart.” They should refrain from making the Sign of the Cross over the person or using the word “bless” in such prayers.

If Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are instructed by their pastors to touch the person on the shoulder or on the head, they are to be careful that the gesture does not resemble laying on of hands and should be aware that their hands may contain particles of the Eucharist.

8. Is it permissible to use a person’s name when distributing Holy Communion?

The words that are to be used when distributing the Host are, “The Body of Christ,” and the words to be used when distributing the Precious Blood are, “The Blood of Christ.” No other words are to be added.

9. What is intinction and is it permitted?

Intinction is a method of distributing Holy Communion under both kinds. The priest takes a host and dips it into the Precious Blood and then gives the Host to the communicant who receives it on the tongue. Communicants are not permitted to take the Host and dip it into the Precious Blood. EMHC are not permitted to distribute Holy Communion through intinction.

If someone approaches you and attempts to dip the Host into the chalice, hold the chalice and invite them to consume the Host. Then present the chalice to them so they may drink directly from it. Be sure to inform your priest after Mass.

10. What if a person kneels to receive Holy Communion?

The posture for reception of Holy Communion in the United States is standing. However, if a communicant comes forward and kneels, the minister is to give Communion to that person.

11. Is it appropriate for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to deny Holy Communion?

Never. At Mass, EMHCs distribute Holy Communion in good faith to all who present themselves for the Sacrament. It is not possible for the EMHC to know if a person has been just reconciled or received into the Church and it is not the role of the EMHC to make that determination. If a person approaching the Sacrament seems to not know how to receive Holy Communion or does not know what to do with the Host, it may be appropriate to ask the individual if they are Catholic, then gently ask the person to eat it or offer to take it back. Remember that confusion may have many causes and does not necessarily indicate that a person is not Catholic. If an EMHC has concerns about an individual, they are to speak with their pastor outside of Mass.

12. What should an EMHC do if a person does not consume the Host?

Because EMHC are often not in a position where they can stop someone who has not consumed the Blessed Sacrament, parishes are encouraged to have Ministers of Hospitality located in places where they can both assist those who need physical help approaching Holy Communion and ensure the safety of the Blessed Sacrament. Please speak with your pastor for his advice on addressing this situation. In all cases, pastoral sensitivity and discretion are required. If no ministers of hospitality are used during this moment in your parish liturgies, it remains the responsibility of the EMHC to safeguard the Eucharist.

13. What should I do if it becomes apparent that there are not enough Hosts?

If you notice that the number of communicants is greater than the total number of consecrated Hosts you may begin breaking the host into smaller pieces and giving each communicant a smaller piece. If Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, they may also receive under the form of wine alone. It is important to remember that "Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, is wholly present under the appearance either of bread or of wine in the Eucharist. Furthermore, Christ is wholly present in any fragment of the consecrated Host or in any drop of the Precious Blood" (USCCB Basic Questions and Answers on the Real Presence).

14. How can persons with celiac sprue disease receive Holy Communion?

For many years, Archbishop Aymond has granted pastors the authority to permit the lay faithful to use low gluten hosts in the reception of Holy Communion. Medical certification is not required and the permission stands for as long as the condition persists.

Low gluten hosts are available from a number of suppliers. Although some of these contain so little gluten that they are permitted by the USDA to be labeled "gluten-free". True gluten free hosts are made with rice or another non-wheat flour. In order to be valid matter for the Eucharist, hosts must be made of wheat and water alone and contain at least a trace amount of gluten. Call the Office of Worship for more information. It is also possible to receive Holy Communion under the form of wine alone.

Ministers are reminded that it is important to ensure that the low gluten host does not come into contact with the regular hosts.

15. What if someone comes forward with a pyx and asks for additional hosts?

The minister should gently ask the person to see the priest after Mass. Hosts are not to be placed in a pyx in the Communion procession. Immediately following the Prayer after Communion those bringing Communion to the sick and homebound are called forward to receive their pyx with the appropriate number of Hosts. A sending forth by the celebrant may be done at this time. Please see the Office of Worship website for a sample sending forth. They may also receive their pyx following Mass or at a time apart from Mass.

16. May Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist with the consumption of what remains of the Precious Blood after the distribution of Holy Communion?

Yes, they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution.

17. Is the purification of the sacred vessels allowed to be done by EMHCs?

Purification of the sacred vessels is **not** allowed to be done by EMHCs: "The sacred vessels are purified by the Priest, the Deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass" (GIRM 279).

18. I would like to bring Communion to hospitals and/or nursing homes. What do I need to do?

EMHC in health care facilities must attend the basic workshop conducted by the Office of Worship. They are then asked to attend a training session conducted by the Office of Health Care Chaplaincy which will cover those areas particular to health care settings.

19. What is a sacrarium?

A sacrarium is a special sink in the sacristy with a drain that goes directly into the ground. It is usually marked with a cover that has a cross engraved on it. The sacrarium is used to rinse altar linens and sacred vessels.

20. What should I do if there are hosts remaining from visits to the sick?

If consecrated hosts remain from a visit to the sick, the EMHC may consume them if they have not yet received the Eucharist themselves on that particular day (Code of Canon Law, 917). If the Host is not consumed, it is to be returned promptly to the church. EMHCs are not permitted to keep the Blessed Sacrament in their homes or in another place.

21. What do I do with my pyx after I bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound?

The pyx 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.

22. What is the Eucharistic fast required for a sick person?

The Eucharistic fast for a sick person is fifteen minutes, if possible (*Immensae Caritatis, III*). If, this is not possible, no fast is required. The fast of fifteen minutes also applies to Roman Catholic family members and health attendants who are properly disposed and wish to receive Holy Communion with the person to whom the Eucharist is being brought.

23. What is the proper procedure to follow when a sick person is unable to consume the host?

If a sick person is unable to consume an entire small host, a smaller piece may be given to him/her. A glass of water may be provided to assist the sick person in consuming the host. If the host is rejected, it should be wrapped in a purificator, and brought to the church or chapel from which the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion was sent. There, it is to be dissolved in a small bowl of water. Once dissolved, this water should be poured into the sacrarium. If a sacrarium is not available, the water may be poured in the garden.