



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

Dear Pastors, Parochial Vicars, Pastoral Associates, and Deacons,

In 1973, Pope Paul VI introduced the practice of allowing laypersons to serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

In many ways this ministry has enabled our people to understand and respond to the call of service within our Church. Through this ministry the Church has made it possible for those who are infirm and unable to attend Mass in their parish Church to receive Holy Communion on the Lord's Day or other days of the week.

In 1997, I promulgated a *Policy for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the Diocese of Worcester*. In 2002, our Holy Father Pope John Paul II promulgated for the universal Church, the Revised *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, which necessitated the updating of our present policy.

Attached is the revised policy.

I hereby promulgate this *Policy for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the Diocese of Worcester*. The policy will take effect Beginning on February 29, 2004, The First Sunday of Lent, and must be implemented in all parishes, schools and institutions where extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion serve. I ask that you familiarize yourself with this policy and distribute it to all those within your parish or institution who are involved in the selection and training of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

The Eucharist is a very special gift of God to the Church. It is important that we continue to catechize our people on the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the Church as we look forward to the eternal banquet of God's Kingdom.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

With gratitude for all you do and asking the Lord to bless you, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Daniel P. Reilly
Bishop of Worcester

January 28, 2004
Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas

POLICY FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION DIOCESE OF WORCESTER

In 1973 Pope Paul VI introduced the practice of commissioning lay persons to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

The purpose of this ministry is to assist the priests and deacons in the distribution of Holy Communion when the number of communicants is so great that the giving and reception of Holy Communion would be unduly prolonged. In addition, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion assists priests and deacons in the distribution of Holy Communion to the sick and homebound.

It is important to note that extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should not be called upon to exercise their ministry when there are a sufficient number of ordinary ministers of Holy Communion available (Bishops, Priests, Deacons).

SELECTION OF MINISTERS

"The person who has been appointed to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is necessarily to be duly instructed and should distinguish himself by his Christian life, faith and morals. Let him strive to be worthy of this great office; let him cultivate devotion to the Holy Eucharist and show himself as an example to others by his piety and reverence for this most holy Sacrament of the altar."¹

Prudent judgment should be used by the pastor in selecting persons to serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The women and men selected should be of deep faith, respected by the community, engaged in living a life consonant with the Gospel and the Church's teaching, and possess the talent and ability to perform this ministry.

AGE, TERM AND PLACE OF SERVICE

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should possess clear signs of maturity and must have already received the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist).

Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion shall be appointed by the Diocesan Bishop for a period of two years with the possibility of reappointment for additional two year terms. It is understood that the pastor or Bishop may terminate this service at any time or the extraordinary minister herself or himself may submit a resignation at any time.

Extraordinary ministers will be designated for service in a specific parish/institution and therefore are not authorized to exercise this ministry in other parishes/institutions unless requested to do so by the pastor of the latter parish/institution for a specific occasion.

Each pastor should ensure that among the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion there is represented a broad range of ages and people of both sexes. This ministry should not be perceived as being for an exclusive group and open to only a select few.

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America allows that “in case of necessity the priest may also commission suitable members of the faithful for the occasion.”²

TRAINING

Persons chosen to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must be instructed to understand the nature of the Eucharist, the meaning of their special ministry and the reverent and responsible manner of exercising it.

The Office for Worship offers training for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in two ways.

1. A yearly training program is offered for the diocese at a particular location to which any person appointed to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion can be sent by their pastor.
2. The Office for Worship will go to any parish or combination of parishes to train groups of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

If an individual parish wishes to train its own ministers, or collaborate with other parishes to train ministers, the curriculum provided by the Diocesan Office for Worship is to be followed. Providing training and resources for ministers is a diocesan responsibility. The office is ready to assist and provide resources necessary to enable parishes to properly train their liturgical ministers.

PRESIDERS AT COMMUNION SERVICES FOR WEEKDAYS

Additionally, it is not to be assumed that because one has received training for as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion that one is thus trained to preside at Communion services on weekdays. In accord with the wishes of the Bishop of Worcester, all leaders of Communion services must be trained and certified through the Diocesan Office for Worship and receive specific delegation for this ministry from the Bishop of Worcester. Without training, certification and delegation no person is to assume the responsibility of leading a Communion service. The ritual to be employed for weekday celebrations is contained in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*.

In the Diocese of Worcester, the Bishop has determined that Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest are **not permitted**. Celebrations of this nature are not to be scheduled by any parish in the Diocese to replace Sunday Masses under any circumstances. The only exception would be in the event of an emergency. (e.g. illness of the priest and a replacement cannot be readily found)

APPROVAL BY THE DIOCESAN BISHOP AND COMMISSIONING

Names of persons who have satisfactorily completed a diocesan or parish training course shall be submitted in writing by the pastor of the person's parish to the Bishop for approval. If permission is sought for students at high schools or colleges within the diocese, the chaplain or campus minister should seek the approval.

Upon approval, the ceremony of commissioning will be held at a parish, campus, or hospital Mass using the *Order for Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers* from The Book of Blessings.

ATTIRE, LITURGICAL PRESENCE, AND PROPER ROLE OF MINISTERS

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion shall dress in a manner consonant with the dignity of their role.

Each parish shall establish a policy on liturgical attire choosing one of these two options:

1. Ministers may wear an alb. This is the only approved vestment for this ministry.³ Academic gowns, stoles, choir robes, etc. are not appropriate attire and therefore not allowed.
2. Ministers may wear secular clothing. In this instance it is expected that the attire will be dignified and appropriate for a liturgical setting.

Each parish shall establish a policy on such matters as placement of seats during the liturgy and whether the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion will be included in the processional and recessional of the liturgy. One of two appropriate options may be chosen.

1. Chairs and kneelers would be provided in the sanctuary area for all ministers of the liturgy including the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion. Care must be exercised in making this judgement to consider the size of the sanctuary and to avoid the appearance that these ministers are apart from or above the rest of the worshipping assembly.
2. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion would sit with their families amidst the assembly and approach the sanctuary only to engage in their ministry and then return to their seats in the assembly.

“If extraordinary ministers are required by pastoral need, they approach the altar as 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, assisted by the deacon, and then hands the sacred vessels to them for distribution of Holy Communion to the people.”⁴ If seats have not already been provided for extraordinary ministers in the sanctuary, they may approach the sanctuary during the singing of the Lamb of God.

The previous practice of extraordinary ministers assisting in the breaking and apportioning of the consecrated hosts and/or the pouring of the Precious Blood has been eliminated. “This rite is reserved to the priest and the deacon.”⁵

“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.”⁶ Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should distinguish themselves from the deacon and concelebrating priests by not standing near them in the sanctuary as they prepare to receive Holy Communion. Rather, extraordinary ministers should stand with the servers, readers and other lay ministers of the liturgy and receive communion in the same manner following the communion of the priest, deacon and concelebrating priests.

Care and dignified presence must be exercised by the extraordinary minister while in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament as well as while carrying it. Ministers must be aware that their actions while ministering the Eucharist speak as loudly if not more loudly than words. Thus responsible, dignified presence is always in order.

Care must always be exercised on the part of the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion after the giving of Communion to the faithful to insure the proper and dignified care of the consecrated elements.

“The chalice may never be left on the altar or another place to be picked up by the communicant for self-communication (except in the case of concelebrating bishops or priests) nor may the chalice be passed from one communicant to another. There shall always be a minister of the chalice.”⁷ The principle of ministering Holy Communion to another is the value the Church is seeking to uphold. After receiving Holy Communion from the priest, an extraordinary minister may then assist the priest in the distribution of Holy Communion under the form of bread or wine to the remaining extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion so that the priest may be free to hand the vessels from the altar to these ministers so that the communion of the faithful may not be unduly delayed.

The consecrated bread that remains must always be returned to the tabernacle. The consecrated wine that remains must always be consumed. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may assist the priest and the deacon in this task after the distribution of communion.

The consecrated wine must **NEVER** be poured into the sink or even placed in the sacrarium.

Extraordinary Ministers should be familiar with the tabernacle, how it opens and where the key is kept. In addition, the extraordinary minister should know the proper manner of cleansing and storing the sacred vessels after communion.

COMMUNION TO THE SICK

The rites outlined in the ritual book, Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rite of Anointing and Viaticum, Chapter 3 are to be followed when bringing Holy Communion to the sick and confined.⁸

A service booklet, Communion of the Sick, containing material from the ritual book has been structured and designed primarily for extraordinary ministers and may be used in its entirety or in part during visits to the sick.⁹

The frequency of these visits to the sick and confined shall be determined by the local parish. When the Eucharistic host is brought to the sick, the extraordinary minister must do so in a dignified and responsible manner. The consecrated host is to be placed in a pyx (the small unbreakable container designed for this purpose) and brought with care directly to the communicant. The consecrated host is never to be kept for any length of time by the Extraordinary Minister in his or her personal possession. The Eucharist is always brought from the church to the person who is receiving. There are no exceptions to this procedure.

CONCLUSION

The various ministries in the Church show forth the variety of gifts given by God's Spirit and placed at the service of the parish community. Therefore under ordinary circumstances an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion should not be engaged in more than one ministerial role at any one liturgy. By implication all other ministries in the liturgical assembly follow the same rule.

The guidance and supervision of the pastor is critical in determining the quality of performance by extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

"Since these faculties are granted only for the spiritual good of the faithful and for cases of genuine necessity, priests are to remember that they are not thereby excused from the task of distributing the Eucharist to the faithful who legitimately request it, and especially from taking and giving it to the sick."¹⁰

This diocesan policy is based on the following four documents:

Immensae Caritatis (1973)¹¹

Inaestimabile Donum (1980)¹²

General Instruction on the Roman Missal (2002)¹³

Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America, (2002)¹⁴.

The Office for Worship is always available to assist parishes in any way possible to promote the ideal expressed in this policy.

This policy is in effect for all places of worship in the Diocese of Worcester.

The effective date of this revised instruction is February 29, 2004

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

+ Daniel P. Reilly

Bishop of Worcester

Thomas J. Sullivan

Chancellor

Date: January 28, 2004

The Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas

REFERENCES

¹ Pope Paul VI, Immensae Caritatis: Instruction on Extraordinary Ministers for the Distribution of Holy Communion, Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, 1973.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America, 2002.

³ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 2002, #339.

⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America, 2002.

⁵ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, General Instruction on the Roman Missal, 2002, #83.

⁶ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America, 2002.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ International Commission on English in the Liturgy, Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rite of Anointing and Viaticum, Catholic Book Publishing, New York, 1983.

⁹ Liturgical Press, Communion of the Sick, Collegeville, MN, 1984.

¹⁰ Pope Paul VI, Immensae Caritatis: Instruction on Extraordinary Ministers for the Distribution of Holy Communion, Sacred Congregation for the Discipline of the Sacraments, 1973.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pope John Paul II, Inaestimabile Donum: On Certain Norms Concerning the Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery, Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, 1980.

¹³ Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship, General Instruction on the Roman Missal, (2002).

¹⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Diocese of the United States of America, 2002.
