



ARCHDIOCESE OF ST. LOUIS

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Archdiocese of St. Louis Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound

Introduction

“The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the Eucharistic community. In bringing communion to them the minister of communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at the Eucharist. For the sick the reception of communion is not only a privilege but also a sign of support and concern shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill”
(*Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, 73).

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) to the Sick and Homebound

General Considerations

- Those ministers who are tasked with bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound are entrusted with sharing the Church’s ministry to the sick in the manner of Jesus Christ. As such, these ministers should undergo training and be officially commissioned by the parish pastor or his delegate.
- To avoid confusion and to maintain clarity of roles, these ministers should be referred to as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) and not by any other title.
- When bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, the EMHC symbolizes Christ and expresses faith and charity on behalf of the parish community towards those unable to attend Sunday Mass. This particular ministry, then, is a tangible expression of the parish’s support and care for its members.
- Visits with Holy Communion to the sick and homebound allow the EMHC to act as a vital connection between the parish community and the sick or homebound individual. They are an extension of the priest’s ministry, ensuring regular contact with Christ in the Eucharist. Ideally, visits are

scheduled after Sunday Mass to maintain a link between the parish Eucharistic celebration and the sick or homebound parishioner.

- EMHC's should demonstrate empathy and compassion, attending to the spiritual, emotional, and material needs of the sick or homebound. They must uphold confidentiality and respect the dignity of the sick at all times. Likewise, they should inform the pastor of any additional pastoral care needs of the sick and homebound (i.e., Sacrament of Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, pastoral visit, among others).

Archdiocesan Guidelines

- The Blessed Sacrament taken to the sick and homebound should be carried in a Pyx or other closed container. The EMHC must handle the Pyx with the utmost respect.
- It is most appropriate for ministers to the sick and homebound to be sent directly from the celebration of the Eucharist. The pastor/priest may call the EMHC forward following the Prayer after Communion to receive the Pyx or the pastor/priest may place the host in the Pyx as the EMHC comes forward to receive Holy Communion.
- When Mass has concluded, the EMHC is to remember that he/she carries the Most Holy Eucharist. The minister is to go directly to the sick or homebound to whom the Eucharist will be distributed. Such ministers are not to go anywhere else or to make any other stops. Ministers are to avoid any activity not in keeping with the reverence due the Blessed Sacrament.
- When carrying the Blessed Sacrament, EMHC should ensure its safety and avoid unnecessary distractions. Common sense and discretion are essential during interactions while carrying the Blessed Sacrament.
- If a EMHC forgets to tell the priest/deacon before Mass that they will be making a visit, they are not to go to the tabernacle on their own but are to let the priest or deacon provide the needed hosts in a Pyx.

Proper storage and respectful handling of the Pyx are crucial when not in use. EMHC should return the Pyx to the parish priest when it is no longer needed.

The appropriate ritual for Holy Communion should be selected based upon the health condition of the sick or homebound individual. Many parishes provide

resources such as the Rite Book or “Blue Communion Booklet” for Communion. A sample ritual is printed below.

EMHC must ensure accurate distribution of Holy Communion. Any extra Hosts may be distributed to family members of the sick or homebound individual who are present, or the surplus Hosts should be returned to the church to be returned to the Tabernacle. The consumption of extra Hosts is only allowed in exceptional circumstances (e.g., the priest/deacon is not at the parish when the minister returns with extra Hosts.)

EMHC are not to take the Blessed Sacrament home or leave unattended in a purse or backpack, a glove compartment, or other compartment in a vehicle, etc.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if the person a minister is visiting says he/she needs to go to confession before receiving Holy Communion? The EMHC may not hear confessions. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is only administered by an ordained priest with proper faculties. If the person asks to see a priest, for whatever reason, the minister should contact the parish priest with person’s name, address, and phone number.

What if the person being visited, or a family member, requests the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick? Only a properly ordained priest can administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The minister should forward this request to the parish priest.

What if the person being visited is dying? In such a situation, this may be the last time the person receives Communion. This is called Viaticum. EMHC are allowed to bring Holy Communion to the dying. If the person is unable to receive Holy Communion, the minister can pray for the person and ask for God’s blessing. The minister should suggest to the family that the parish priest be contacted for the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

What if a minister, when bringing Holy Communion to a sick or homebound person, is asked by a non-Catholic to receive Holy Communion? A non-Catholic should not receive Holy Communion; however, the minister can offer to pray with the person.

What should be done if a host is dropped, or the sick or homebound person cannot consume the host and spits it out? If the Host is dropped, the minister may pick it up and consume it, if he/she is comfortable doing so.

If the sick or homebound person spits the Host out or cannot consume it, the minister may use a towel or tissue to pick up the Host and securely wrap it. The minister should take the host until visitations are finished. The Host should be given to the parish priest, a deacon, or an instituted acolyte who will dissolve the Host in water and pour the water into the sacrarium.

What if the person cannot consume an entire host? In such a situation, the sick person receiving Holy Communion may be offered water to help in swallowing the Host. If necessary, a small portion of the Host can be given to the sick person. The remaining portion of the Host may be consumed by a Catholic family member/friend participating in the prayer or the remaining Host is to be returned to the church.

What if there are particles of the Host left in the Pyx? An empty Pyx is to be purified after each use. If the EMHC brings Holy Communion on a weekly basis to the sick or homebound, the minister may purify the Pyx. The minister should place some water in the Pyx to dissolve the particles of the Blessed Sacrament and then consume the water. The Pyx is then dried with a towel. This water is not to be poured down a regular sink. If the EMHC does not bring Holy Communion on a weekly basis, then the Pyx is to be returned to the parish priest or deacon who will purify the Pyx.

What if the sick person has a mental illness or is heavily medicated and does not appear to understand what is happening? It is best to use good pastoral judgment in such a situation. If the person has some awareness of what is happening and wants to receive Communion, then the Host can be given to the person, but the minister should make sure the Host is consumed.

What if the sick or homebound person has just finished eating or is in the middle of eating a meal when the EMHC arrives? People who are ill or elderly are not required to abstain from food and drink one hour before receiving Holy Communion.

If others are present, should the minister invite them to pray and to receive Holy Communion with the sick person? By all means. Others who are present should be invited to pray and all Catholics who are participating may be invited to receive Communion, as long as the minister has enough Hosts.

What if an individual presents a Pyx to the priest or EMHC in the Communion line at Mass? Best practice would be to tell the individual to see one of the priests after Mass. If this is a parish minister to the homebound, the priest can explain why he needs to know who is taking Holy Communion to the

homebound before Mass. If the person presenting the Pyx is either not a parishioner or someone who is unfamiliar to the priest, he can inquire to whom the person is bringing Communion, if the person is an EMHC, and other related questions.

Who Can Open the Tabernacle? It is not the task of acolytes or EMHC to open and close the Tabernacle, unless there are exceptional circumstances. The priest or deacon, who is the ordinary minister of Holy Communion, is the one who can and should open the Tabernacle to retrieve and return Consecrated Hosts. If the parish priest or deacon is not available, then in these special circumstances, an EMHC can open the Tabernacle and return unused hosts and then purify the Pyx as mentioned above.

Suggested Celebrant Wording When EMHC Are Presented with A Pyx Following the Prayer After Communion

In these or similar words, the priest says:

Dear brother(s) and/or sister(s), this Eucharistic congregation now entrusts you with the ministry of going out to our brother(s) and sister(s) who is/are unable to join us in person today. Convey our warm greetings to them, share today's Holy Scriptures, engage in prayer together, and offer them the Most Blessed Sacrament.

A Sample Rite for Distribution of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound in the Parishes of the Archdiocese of St. Louis

INTRODUCTORY RITE

GREETING

All: In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Minister: May the peace of the Lord be with you (and all who live here) always.

All: And with your spirit.

PENITENTIAL ACT

Minister: My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves for this celebration, let us call to mind our sins.

[Option A:]

All: I confess to almighty God, and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done, and in what I have failed to do,

[And, striking their breast, they say:]

through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore, I ask blessed Mary, ever-virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

[Option B:]

Minister: Lord Jesus, you healed the sick: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Christ Jesus, you forgive sinners: Christ, have mercy.

All: Christ, have mercy.

Minister: Lord Jesus, you heal us and bring us strength: Lord, have mercy.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

READING OF THE WORD

[The Minister may proclaim the day's reading(s) and Gospel; or may choose a short reading or one of the following verses from Scriptures:]

† Jesus says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and find life burdensome, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon your shoulders and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your soul will find rest, for my yoke is easy and my burden light." [Matthew 11:28-30]

† Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you live in me and I in you, you will produce abundantly. Apart from me you can do nothing." [John 15:5]

† Jesus says, "I myself am the bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." [John 6:51]

† Jesus says, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me." [John 14:6]

† "We have come to know and believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him." [I John 4:16]

RECEPTION OF HOLY COMMUNION

Minister: Now let us pray together to the Father in the words given to us by our Lord Jesus Christ:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily

bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

[The Minister holds up the Host:]

Minister: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All: Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

[The Minister distributes Holy Communion.]

Minister: Body of Christ.

All: Amen.

CONCLUSION

Minister: Let us pray ...

[The Minister recites the “Prayer After Communion” of the day or other prayer(s) for health and healing, such as:

Loving God, we thank you for the nourishment you give us through your holy gift. Pour out your Spirit upon us, and in the strength of this food from heaven, grant us strength, healing, and peace. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.]

All: Amen

Minister: [And making the Sign of the Cross on him/herself:]

May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.