

# Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist<sup>1</sup>.

**What are 'extraordinary' ministers?** In this case 'extraordinary' has a technical meaning. It simply means 'out of the ordinary', rather than 'great' or 'remarkable'. It is used to distinguish the 'extraordinary' minister from the 'ordinary' or 'normal' minister. The 'ordinary' ministers of Holy Communion are **Bishops, priests and deacons**.

At Mass Holy Communion is made available to us from the elements over which the priest celebrant has offered the **Thanksgiving**. It is therefore important that the connection between our Communion and the Sacrifice of the Mass is made clear. One of the ways in which this is achieved is by Holy Communion being distributed by the priest celebrant. Other priests or deacons will assist the priest, if necessary. When there not enough other 'ordinary' ministers present, then the priest celebrant may be assisted by 'extraordinary' ministers.

**Ministry in the Church.** All ministry in the Church is ordered to the building up of the Body of Christ. It is there to assist humankind to enter more fully into the communion of love that is God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The focus of all liturgical ministry is to assist people's communion with God through their fruitful participation in the worship of the Church.

**Ministering Holy Communion to the Church.** The highpoint of Catholic worship is the celebration of the Eucharist, for in it Christ associates his Church and all her members with his sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving offered once for all upon the cross to his Father. The culmination of the Eucharist is our reception of the gifts of the Lord's Body and Blood in Holy Communion. Ministers of Holy Communion assist the Church receive these gifts reverently and fruitfully.

## **Ministering the Body and Blood of Christ**

When individuals are unwilling to receive directly from the chalice, because of colds or other illness, they should be advised to receive Holy Communion under one kind for the duration of their illness.

**Holy Communion under both kinds** The Church encourages that, whenever practical, Holy Communion should be distributed to the faithful under both kinds, that is, under the forms of both Bread and Wine.

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father's Kingdom. (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 281*)

When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, and a deacon is present he should always be one of the ministers of the chalice.

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<sup>1</sup> Ministers of Holy Communion is one of a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Commission to support the continuing formation of liturgical ministers in **Westminster diocese**. Other resources can be downloaded from <http://rcdow.org.uk/diocese/liturgy/>. Acknowledgements: Scripture texts are from The Jerusalem Bible © 1966 by Darton Longman & Todd Ltd and Doubleday and Company Ltd. Reproduced with permission.

**Ministering the Host** The minister takes a host, raises it just a little and shows it to the communicant saying: The Body of Christ. The communicant answers: Amen. Communion is then ministered. The minister should not make the sign of the Cross with the host before ministering Holy Communion. Those receiving the host are free to choose whether to receive in the hand or directly on the tongue.

**Ministering the Precious Blood** Standing before a communicant the minister raises the chalice just a little and shows it to the communicant, saying: The Blood of Christ. The communicant answers: Amen. The minister then hands the chalice to the communicant who then drinks from it, and returns the chalice to the minister. The minister then wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator.

**Blessings** Should people present themselves to a minister (ordained or lay) for a Blessing rather than for Holy Communion, then the Blessing should be ministered by laying a hand on the person's head and saying words such as: *May the love of God be strong in your heart.* These words should not be accompanied by a sign of the cross.

## **Ministering Holy Communion to the Sick and Housebound**

One of the most important developments in the Church's ministry to the sick over the past decades has been the introduction of lay liturgical ministers. These ministers have enabled the sick and the housebound to receive Holy Communion with greater frequency. Through their commitment and generosity they have supplemented and complemented the ministry of the Church's priests. This leaflet offers some brief guidance for those called to this ministry.

**Visits to the Sick:** The ministering of Holy Communion to the sick finds its setting in the broader context of visits and ministry to the sick. The minister of Holy Communion will generally find him or herself part of a team of ministers - including the parish priest.

**Communion to the Sick** How the needs of the sick are met is a matter for the parish to consider. Different people will wish to receive Holy Communion with regularity. Some will have been used to being at Mass daily, others weekly, others still less frequently. It is good if a parish and its ministry team are able to honour different people's different needs. The rite of 'Communion of the Sick' includes a liturgy of the word as well as of Holy Communion.

### **Dismissal of Commissioned Ministers taking Communion to the Housebound or Sick**

It is fitting for Holy Communion to be taken directly from Mass to the sick or those unable to leave their homes. Appropriate times for the ministers of Holy Communion to receive a pyx from the priest and be 'sent' to take Holy Communion and leave the assembly are either after the Communion of the people or immediately before the final blessing. The ministers may depart before the Prayer after Communion prayer; immediately after the Prayer after-Communion; or as part of the concluding procession of ministers. Local circumstances will determine which of these various options will be most fitting in any particular parish. The priest will normally speak words of dismissal or missioning over the ministers taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. These words may be based on the words of the Communion antiphon, on the readings of the day, or in a simple form such as:

*Go now, to our sisters and brothers unable to be with us for reasons of sickness and infirmity. Take to them from our celebration the word of God and Holy Communion that they might share with us these signs of the Lord's goodness.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Administering Holy Communion to the Sick and Housebound in the Parish of Our Lady Star of the Sea Weymouth**

Eucharistic Ministers taking Holy Communion to the Sick and Housebound do so after the 6pm Mass on Saturday evening and the 8am and 10am Masses on the Sunday. They are all asked to go straight from the Church to the recipients. All those people receiving Holy Communion from us have a prayer book, designed and produced in the parish, which includes a short service and has, in addition, other prayers which they may like to use. If those Ministers going out after the 8am Mass have recipients in both nursing homes and their own homes they are usually asked to go to the nursing homes first, as those people in the nursing homes will have been got ready by the staff; those in their own homes, possibly living on their own, will have greater difficulty getting ready early.

Currently we take Holy Communion to 30+ people on Sunday. One of our deacons takes Communion to an additional 9 people some of whom live on Portland. The lay Ministers operate in teams of 4 working to a rota provided for them. It has to be said of them that they are excellent in arranging to cover for each other so that no recipients are without Holy Communion. They all see this as a very important Ministry. All lay Ministers are aware of the need to ensure that any request from a recipient for a visit from the priest must be given to our Parish Priest immediately. They are also aware of the need to report any deterioration in health so that the sacrament of the sick can be administered quickly.

**Pauline Toohey**

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<sup>2</sup> All of the above has been taken, with verbal permission, from the Westminster Diocesan Liturgy Commission guidance for Ministers of Holy Communion.