



Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Diocese of Boise

Introduction: Since 1971, the faithful who are not ordained have been allowed to serve as extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. This permission was extended to them by the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments (at the time, the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments), in order to assist, if necessary, the *ordinary* ministers of Holy Communion (bishops, priests, and deacons are ordinary ministers). This means that, practically speaking, if there are not enough ordinary ministers to distribute communion in such a manner that the communion rite will not take too long, then the priest may request that EMs assist him. EMs may also be asked by the priest to take communion to the sick and homebound; although in some parishes, this may be a separate ministry.

Men who are instituted acolytes (usually because they have reached that place in their path to ordination to the diaconate or the priesthood), are also considered Extraordinary Ministers.



Who May Serve as an Extraordinary Minister in the Diocese of Boise?

- EMs must be at least 16 years of age;
- They must be practicing Catholics who have themselves received the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist;
- They must model a Catholic Christian way of life; and
- If they are married, they must be in a marriage that is valid according to the Catholic Church.

How Do I Become an Extraordinary Minister in the Diocese of Boise?

If you are interested in serving as an EM, you may approach the priest of your parish, or the minister in charge of the ministry of EMs, and volunteer to be part of this ministry. As well, you may *be* approached by your priest or another minister. Once you have prayerfully discerned that this is a role for you, you will undergo a training at your parish. Your training should cover the theology of both the Eucharist and of this ministry; and it should give you a clear understanding of the practical process involved when serving in this role at Mass.



What Does an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion Do (and *Not* Do) at Mass?

Let's take this from the beginning. While there are many differences in how each parish may train their EMs, there are some basics that should be common to all.

- Most parishes do not include EMs in the entrance procession. EMs should simply be seated in their pew, in a place that makes it relatively easy for them to get to and from the sanctuary without unduly distracting the community.
- It's important for the EM to be a fully participating member of the liturgy during Mass. After all, EMs are first baptized members of the assembly. They should sing and respond with all the faithful at the appropriate parts of Mass; they should stand, sit, kneel and observe all postures and gestures along with all the faithful. It's important for EMs to represent the postures and gestures as directed by the appropriate liturgical documents and by the bishop of this diocese. (For example, the posture to receive communion in the United States is standing; while a communicant may kneel to receive, a minister in the liturgy should stand; they should at all times model what the documents and the bishop determined will be the standard.)
- In many parishes, the Extraordinary Ministers come up into the sanctuary during the sign of peace or the *Agnus Dei*. This may continue. While the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) states that EMs approach the altar "as the priest receives Communion," it is helpful to distinguish "approaching the altar" from "approaching the sanctuary." EMs should do as their parish practices indicate, as long as they do not approach the altar itself until after the priest's communion.

- EMs should receive communion after the priest and deacon have received. The practice of EMs waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law. (*Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds*, #39; hereafter *Norms*.) “After all Eucharistic ministers have received Communion, the bishop or priest celebrant reverently hands vessels containing the Body or the Blood of the Lord to the deacons or extraordinary ministers who will assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. The deacon may assist the priest in handing the vessels...to the extraordinary ministers...” (*Norms*, #40.) It is not permitted for the EMs to take the vessels off the altar themselves, nor may EMs pass their cup, containing the Precious Blood, to another EM. In other words, an EM who administers the Precious Blood to another EM must then retain that cup; the cup does not get passed from minister to minister. “The faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated bread or sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them from one to another” (GIRM #160).
- After they receive communion, the EM goes to the designated place to offer either the Precious Blood to the faithful, or the Host. The EM holds up the Host or the chalice and says, “The Body/Blood of Christ,” to which the communicant responds, “Amen.” EMs should not add words to this formula (including the words, “This is...”, or the communicant’s name). If distributing the Host, the EM places it either in the communicant’s hand or on the tongue, depending on the preference of the communicant. If distributing the Precious Blood, the EM offers the chalice to the communicant, who drinks from it. The EM then receives the chalice back, and carefully wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator before presenting the chalice to the next communicant.
- It’s important to note that communicants themselves determine whether they kneel or stand to receive, and whether they receive the host in the hand or on the tongue.
- After the distribution of communion to the faithful, All Ems take their vessel to the altar or to the credence table. EMs may consume the remaining Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution after Holy Communion. They then return to their seats, as the parish practice indicates. EMs are no longer permitted to purify the sacred vessels after Communion. “The sacred vessels are purified by the priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, insofar as possible at the credence table.” (GIRM #279.)



Related Questions:

- **Should an EM Refuse Communion to Someone Kneeling?** “The norm established for the Dioceses of the United States of America is that Holy Communion is to be received standing...” (GIRM #160). However, it goes on to say that the faithful may receive kneeling. That is not the norm, but *no member of the faithful is to be denied communion based on posture*. Those who wish to kneel to receive may do so.
- **Do EMs give communion on the hand, or tongue?** “When receiving Holy Communion, the communicant bows his or her head before the Sacrament as a gesture of reverence and receives the Body of the Lord from the minister. The consecrated host may be received either on the tongue or in the hand, at the discretion of each communicant” (GIRM #160). The extraordinary minister may not determine for the communicant where to receive communion, on the hand or tongue.
- **What about intinction?** The practice of the communicant dipping the host into the chalice of Precious Blood is not allowed. If a communicant approaches the EM and asks to do this, the EM may send that person to the priest, who can intinct the host for them.
- **Can EMs Give Blessings?** Lay ministers should not bless with a gesture or formula used by clerics. (For example, they should *not* make the sign of the cross over someone while using the Trinitarian formula.) But a simple “Receive the Lord Jesus in your heart,” or, “May God bless you,” would be appropriate. The extraordinary minister should not lay hands on the person. The laying on of hands has its own sacramental significance and is inappropriate in this context (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, November 22, 2008). Likewise, no one (cleric or lay) should give a blessing with the host in their hand, simulating Benediction. An EM may also send someone asking for a blessing to the priest or deacon.
- **What if a Host gets dropped or the Precious Blood is spilled?** If either the EM or the communicant drops a Host, the EM should simply pick it up and place it on the altar, and alert the priest or deacon that it is there. It can be consumed or else dissolved in water which is then poured into the sacrarium. If some of the Precious Blood is spilled, again, a priest or deacon should be alerted. The spill will be cleaned with water that will also be placed into a sacrarium, and any cloths used can also be rinsed out there. In either case, the EM should not panic, but discretely deal with the spill.

- **What if I give the Host to someone who doesn't consume it?** It's very important to be sure that the communicant consumes the Host immediately. If the EM observes that this does not happen, either they, or a priest or deacon, should ask the communicant to please consume the Host. This should be done as discretely as possible, but under no circumstances should a communicant be allowed to carry the Host, unconsumed, back to their pew or out of the church.

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