

Diocese of Rockford: Norms and Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound

Office of Divine Worship - Diocese of Rockford © March 2004

The following Diocesan norms and guidelines are intended to assist parishes in the *choice, formation,* and *support* of those persons who are privileged to be appointed by the Bishop as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound. The Bishop has the faculty to appoint qualified persons, men and women, as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. (CL 910; 230 §3)

I. General Principles

Bishops, priests, and deacons are the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion and, therefore, assume this responsibility *first*. It is only when the number of ordinary ministers is insufficient to meet the pastoral needs of the sick, that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion assist in this ministry.

1. Extraordinary Ministers may also be appointed to bring Holy Communion to the sick, the elderly and homebound, who, by reason of their illness and/or confinement at home or other care facilities, are not able to be physically present for the celebration of Mass. The purpose of this ministry is to bring Holy Communion to them and thus unite them spiritually to the worshiping community.
2. Those men and women chosen for this ministry must be comfortable in the presence of those who are sick, aged, injured or dying, so that their presence aids the person(s) in their understanding and acceptance of their condition as being joined to our Lord.

II. General Norms

1. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick is to approach the altar *after* the distribution of Holy Communion has been completed, ***but before the Prayer after Communion***, to receive the pyx with the Blessed Sacrament *from the priest or deacon*. The community may be invited to pray for them and those to whom they will minister. The Extraordinary Minister(s) is(are) then to leave the altar with the pyx(es) and proceed *immediately* to the assigned sick person(s). ***They are not to remain for any further prayers or blessings or gatherings***. Because they are carrying Holy Communion, their reverent demeanor will be an example to others.
2. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick is to use the *Rite of Administration of Communion to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister* as it is found in the ritual book.

The *Rite of Administration of Communion to the Sick* should take place immediately upon arrival, that is, after greeting the sick person and family members. The rite may be found in the *Roman Ritual, Pastoral Care of the Sick*, nn. 76 - 92. There is a separate, bilingual pamphlet of this rite printed by the USCCB in 1999 which is recommended for use.

The time for visiting is *after* Communion has been received and the rite has been completed. In this way, all will come to a deeper reverence of Holy Communion and the abiding, real presence of Jesus Christ in this Sacrament.

III. Requirements for the preparation and continuing formation of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the Sick and the Homebound

The Pastor is to decide who should be chosen to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick, bearing in mind the following:

1. Men and women, sixteen years and older, representative of the parish community, may be chosen.
2. Each person selected should be a practicing Catholic, in good standing, whose conduct of life does not contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church as described by the Magisterium, who is fully initiated through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.
3. Those persons selected for this ministry are to be given an appropriate formation in the theology of the Eucharist based on the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 3, *The Sacrament of the Eucharist*, numbers 1322-1419.

It is recommended that use is made of *The Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of the Eucharist* (USCCB 2001) in the catechetical formation of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick. Additional catechetical material may be found in the document, *Norms for the distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* (USCCB, July, 2002).

4. The instruction necessary for competency in this liturgical ministry should include:
 - a. An adult understanding of the Eucharist in its historical, theological, liturgical, pastoral and spiritual dimensions;
 - b. A knowledge about and an understanding of this particular liturgical ministry and its relationship to other liturgical roles within the celebration of Mass;
 - c. Sufficient skills in the liturgical style of movement and, in particular, in the proper reverence in handling the Blessed Sacrament.
 - d. Those ministering to the sick and homebound need: (1) formative education in the Church's attitude and teaching toward suffering and death; (2) training in ways to minister to those who are sick; (3) and familiarity with the *Rite of Communion for the Sick*. Additionally, *Roman Ritual, Pastoral Care of the Sick*, and, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, (John Paul II, 1984) should be consulted as primary sources for this formation.
5. For all Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist for the Sick and Homebound, there should be regular opportunities for formation, resulting in the spiritual growth of the ministers. Ministry to the sick and homebound carries its own burdens through involvement in the spiritual care of the sick. It is recommended that Extraordinary Ministers to the Sick meet on a regular (quarterly) basis for:
 - (1) prayer and mutual support in their ministry ;
 - (2) for sharing concerns;
 - (3) for reviewing and improving the ministry where necessary.

IV. Procedure for obtaining Appointments as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound

1. The **Pastor** of a parish is to submit **to the Bishop**, in writing, the names of those persons who qualify and have been chosen to be appointed as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick. When submitting *first* names, the **full baptismal name** is to be given rather than shortened names or nicknames.
2. The appointment is made to a specific parish and is exercised in that parish only. If the minister moves to a different parish, the appointment ceases.
3. The appointment as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a privilege, not a right. Therefore, **the appointment is made for a specific period of three years and may be terminated before the completion of the term.**
4. The Pastor has the option of re-submitting the names of the same persons for a second term of three years. At the end of this second term, an entirely new group of ministers is to be chosen.

This change has the merit of avoiding the presumption that this ministry belongs by right to any individual, family or group. A specific period of time for the appointment has the additional value that the minister, by his/her choice, is able to leave the ministry if necessary, and/or, for the Pastor, if necessary, to request that a particular person leave the ministry.

5. A letter of approval for the appointments will be issued from the Chancellor of the Diocese along with certificates of appointment and **copies of these guidelines for each person so appointed.**
6. The Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick are to be commissioned to this ministry in the presence of the parish community at a Sunday Mass. The rite of commissioning to be used is found in the *Book of Blessings*, which is part of the Roman Ritual: *Order of Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion within Mass*, (pages 795-99 in the Catholic Book Company, 1989 version), nn. 871 to 1881.

V. Reverence in Obtaining Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

For those Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick who obtain the Blessed Sacrament at Mass, please note well:

**It is improper to come forward in the Communion procession
and ask for the Blessed Sacrament to be placed in a pyx
either before or after you yourself have received Holy Communion.**

The proper procedure is to come forward to the altar *after* the distribution of Holy Communion has been completed, and before the Prayer after Communion, to receive the Eucharist. You are then to go directly to the person(s) to whom you are bringing Holy Communion as noted above in nn. 1 and 2 of the General Norms.

The following guidelines are to be observed in all Parishes:

1. The Communion Procession has one purpose: for those persons who are in the state of grace to come forward in an orderly fashion to receive Holy Communion.
2. Each person who receives the Blessed Sacrament is asked to respond to the words “*The Body of Christ*”, and/or “*The Blood of Christ*” with the affirmation of faith in the word “*Amen*” as stated in the guidelines for the proper reception of Holy Communion. Phrases such as “Thank you,” or “I believe” or any variation thereof are not proper.
3. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to come forward in the Communion Procession with an open pyx and expect to have the Blessed Sacrament placed in their pyx, saying “I’ll take one (or whatever number) please.”
4. It is a liturgical abuse for any priest, deacon or duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to place the Blessed Sacrament in a pyx held by any person in the Communion Procession.
5. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to obtain the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle before Mass and then remain at Mass with the Blessed Sacrament on his or her person.
6. It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick, even though he or she receives the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament at the proper time during Mass [or after Mass], to remain afterwards for any social gathering or meeting with the Blessed Sacrament on their person. The Blessed Sacrament is to be brought directly to the sick person. (Cf. above, II General Norms, 1 and 2; and n. 7, below.)
7. The proper time for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to obtain the Blessed Sacrament is after the distribution of Communion has been completed at Mass. The Extraordinary Minister(s) of Holy Communion to the Sick is(are) to come forward *to the altar before the Prayer after Communion to receive the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament*. Having received the pyx, the minister(s) is dismissed and is to leave the Church **immediately to bring the Blessed Sacrament to the Sick**. Under no circumstances may the Extraordinary Minister keep the Blessed Sacrament until later in the day for distribution.
8. The practice of leaving the pyx, containing the Blessed Sacrament, on the altar for the Extraordinary Minister to pick up himself/herself is improper. **The pyx is to be given to the minister by the priest or deacon.**
9. If the Blessed Sacrament for the Sick is not obtained at Mass, then the local parish must decide on the procedure to obtain the Blessed Sacrament keeping in mind due custody for the key to the Tabernacle and the proper reverence shown to the Blessed Sacrament.
10. Any other particular pastoral situations or liturgical concerns are to be addressed to the Office for Divine Worship for guidance and/or clarification.