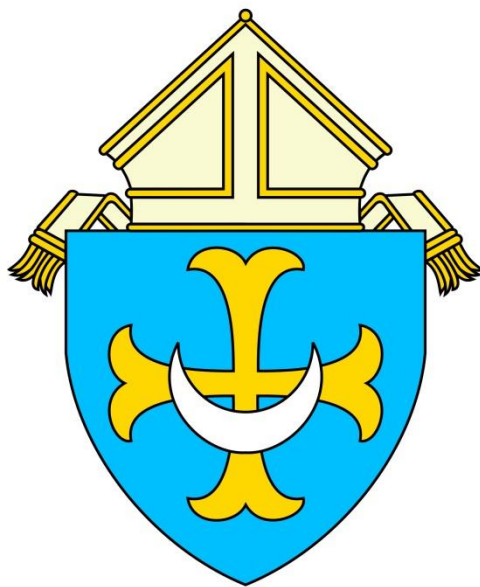


Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

(Updated September 2016)



**Office of Worship
Diocese of Trenton**

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

I. Introduction

In the decades that have passed since the reform of the Roman Catholic liturgy following the Second Vatican Council, the use of lay persons to distribute Holy Communion has become a widespread practice, not only in the Diocese of Trenton, but the wider Church. As with any sacramental practice in the Church, while theology does not change, occasionally after reflection, rubrics and practices surrounding the sacraments may be addressed. This is done to make sure that these practices allow the faithful appropriate access to the sacraments, remain true to their theology, are in line with the guidelines of the universal Church, and are practical for individual parishes and the entire diocese to implement/follow. In 2004, following the promulgation of the new English translation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), the Office of Worship for the Diocese of Trenton issued a comprehensive guide/set of norms for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. This document is not meant to replicate the wealth of information contained in that guide, instead this is meant to streamline information, boiling it down to its essential elements. Some aspects of those earlier guidelines are, however, changing: in particular, because of a new attached decree from the bishop concerning how Extraordinary Ministers are given their *mandatum* to serve.

II. The Justification for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The need for greater accessibility to the Eucharist following the post-Vatican II reform of the liturgy led to a 1973 document from the Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments¹ *Immensae*

¹ now the combined Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (CDWDS)

Caritatis. The first subheading of this document called for “Special Ministers of the Eucharist” in two particular circumstances:

- Within Mass because of a great crowd of people or some disability of the celebrant;
- Outside Mass when the distance makes it difficult to bring communion, especially as viaticum to the sick in danger of death; or when the sheer number of sick people, especially in hospitals or similar institutions, requires several ministers.

These circumstances still exist, and faculties are still given to local Ordinaries to “permit fit persons,” each chosen by name, to be these ministers: for single instances, on a temporary, and even on a permanent basis. These permissions go into effect when:

- No priest, deacon, or (instituted) acolyte is available;
- When those same (above-listed) ministers are impeded from administering communion because of another pastoral ministry, ill-health, or old age;
- Whenever the number of the faithful wishing to receive communion is so great that the celebration of Mass or the giving of communion outside of Mass would take too long.²

In the current diocesan situation, these are still the three circumstances in which lay ministers can, should, and are used.

Before moving on, a word of caution should be included surrounding the practice of utilizing Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. This caution has been sounded by the Church multiple times in the years since giving this permission. It is expressed because, after observing common practice, leadership within the Church is concerned that the utilization of these extraordinary ministers can become far too ordinary, to the point of being normative or presumed. In opposition to this, one finds in Canon Law, Canon 230 § 3 which begins the

² All of the above is found in: Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments, *Immensae Caritatis-On Facilitating Reception of Communion in Certain Circumstances*. Heading : Special Ministers of the Eucharist. January 29,1973. Full text in English from www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDWIMCAR.HTM
This is briefly mentioned in the Code of Canon Law: 230 §3

permission for these lay ministers by allowing them only ‘when the need of the Church warrants it and ministers are lacking.’ Local guidelines in the United States, entitled “Norms for Distribution of Holy Communion in the United States” call for these ministers only “in case of necessity.”³ Identical wording is found in #162 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. In 1997, an entire section of a multi-dicasterial instruction on the collaboration of the non-ordained with Priests expanded this concern, echoing much of what can be found above, adding an additional caveat: “this function (lay ministers distributing Holy Communion) is supplementary and **extraordinary** and must be exercised in accordance with the norm of law.”⁴ Finally in 2004 the CDWDS issued an instruction entitled, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*. A section of this document sought to clarify the title given to deputed lay ministers. It eliminated the title “Special Ministers of Holy Communion” from *Immensae Caritatis*, and asserted that the only correct title should be “Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.” This clarified title was meant to replace other terms used by which, “the meaning of this function (lay ministers of Holy Communion) is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.”⁵

III. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Diocese of Trenton

The Diocese of Trenton has a long-standing tradition of Extraordinary Ministers in its parishes, and this will continue: because of parish size and Mass attendance, the distribution of both Eucharistic species during communion, and shortages of Ordinary ministers, not just for

³ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *Norms for the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States*. #28. June 13, 2001.

⁴ Saint Pope John Paul II. “Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest.” Article 8. August 15, 1997. Full Text in English www.vatican.va/roman__curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html

⁵ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*. March 25, 2004. Full Text in English. http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html

Mass but also for homebound and institutional distribution of the Sacrament. You will find, attached to these updated guidelines, a Decree of Promulgation from the Bishop, the Most Reverend David O’Connell, which clarifies how Extraordinary Ministers are to be chosen and trained, and changes how they will receive their mandate to serve in the Diocese. This decree, effective on the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, September 8, 2016, simplifies the mandating of these ministers both for parishes and for the Diocese by removing a superfluous step. The primary simplification is that from September 8, 2016, onward, parish pastors are delegated to select and mandate Extraordinary Ministers in the name of the Bishop. This will eliminate the step, which was previously diocesan policy, of forwarding a list of potential ministers to the Diocesan Office of Worship and awaiting the return of individual *mandatum* cards for each minister. While this step is eliminated, it is still incumbent upon pastors and parishes to use the following guidelines in the choosing, training, and mandating of Extraordinary Ministers.

IV. The Required Qualifications for Extraordinary Ministers

- Potential Candidates for this ministry must have received all of the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist). There will not be a minimum age requirement, however the candidates should be of an age and maturity that they can understand the nature of the role they are fulfilling, and conduct themselves with proper reverence and poise. The suggested minimum age is 16; any adaptation of this is at the pastor’s discretion.
- Candidates must not be in a state that would exclude them from full communion with the Church. (grave public sin, apostasy) This would include a requirement, if married, to be in a marriage recognized as valid by the Church.
- Candidates must be persons “whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them.”⁶
- Candidates must be adequately catechized in the theology of the Eucharist and about the ministry they exercise, and assent to Church teaching on the Sacraments. This would

⁶ *Immensae Caritatis*, 1

include showing proper reverence for and devotion to the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharistic species.

V. **The Responsibilities of the Pastor and Parish for Extraordinary Ministers**

- Parishes must assess their needs to determine if Extraordinary Ministers are necessary.
- They must oversee the recruitment and vetting of potential ministers.
 - It is the pastor's responsibility to verify that potential ministers fulfill the above requirements.
- The parish must provide training for the potential ministers. This training must provide ministers with
 - A renewed instruction in Eucharistic Doctrine.
 - A full understanding of the service the ministers provide as well as the distinction between Ordinary and Extraordinary ministers.
 - The reverence to be shown for the Blessed Sacrament and the discipline that is required for the admission of the faithful into Holy Communion.
 - The rubrics to be observed in general and which are particular to the parish in which the ministers will serve.
- Ministers will receive a *mandatum* from the parish pastor to serve in an individual parish according to the September 8, 2016 *Decree of Promulgation*, and the names of those mandated should be made known to the parish (ex. publication of a list of names in the bulletin). **A *mandatum* to become an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion only applies in the parish in which the minister serves. If a minister desires, or is needed to serve in another parish, even within the diocese, they must have the permission of that parish's pastor and receive delegation to serve individually in that setting.**
- New Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, should not serve until they have been commissioned using the ritual found in the *Book of Blessings*, which begins at #1871. This may be done as a special celebration within the parish, even at a Sunday liturgy.
 - Ministers may serve for a temporary, agreed upon term, or in a "stable" way. It is up to the parish pastor if he wishes to set limitations for the length of the *mandatum* given.

- If Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are visiting Nursing Homes, Hospitals, or the Homebound, they must follow the ritual as it is presented (longer or shorter form) in the approved *Pastoral Care of the Sick* ritual book. Use of the smaller *Communion for the Sick* book is also permissible.

VI. Additional Concerns and Rubrical Items

- Ministers to the sick and homebound should depart directly from the parish Mass. However, even if this is not possible, the minister must transport the hosts in a pyx, and go directly from the Church to visit the communicants. **No detours are permitted during the transportation and distribution of Holy Communion. All consecrated hosts must be consumed or returned to the parish. Under no circumstances may the Blessed Sacrament be reserved outside of the Church tabernacle. (ex. in a car or at home)**
- Only consecrated hosts may be transported by ministers to communicants outside the Church, the Precious Blood may not be reserved or transported.
- The parish and pastor must be aware of all distribution of Communion to homebound parishioner or in institutional settings, as they are responsible for the care of the sacramental species consecrated in their Church.
- The roles of Ordinary and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must not be confused. For this reason, Extraordinary Ministers should not come forward at Mass to receive communion until the Ordinary Ministers have received.⁷
- The words used at the distribution of Communion are “the Body of Christ” for consecrated hosts and “the Blood of the Christ” for the Precious Blood. No other words are allowed. The communicants respond by saying “Amen.”
- Communicants in the Diocese come forward in procession and receive from a minister while standing. However, communicants who kneel or genuflect should be accommodated, as well as those who cannot approach the altar.
- Communicants may receive consecrated hosts on the tongue or in the hand. The precious blood is received directly from the cup. **Intinction of the consecrated host into the precious blood is not the practice of the Diocese of Trenton, and can only be done according to approved rubrics.**

⁷ “Instruction on Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of Priest,” Article 8.

- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not self-communicate, but if a consecrated host falls to the floor, it should be immediately be picked up and consumed by the minister. If the host is too soiled to be consumed, it is dissolved in water and poured into the Sacarium, which leads into the ground. Spilled Precious Blood should be cleaned quickly and thoroughly with purificators and the area then cleansed with water.
- The purification of sacred vessels is done by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may help cleanse the vessels, but they **may not purify them.**⁸ **Purification, however, should be done promptly, after communion distribution is completed or immediately after Mass.**
- If an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is distributing the Precious Blood, they and should consume any of the species that remains in the cup.
- At the Communion Rite, during Mass, only Ordinary Ministers of Communion should bring the reserved Sacrament from the tabernacle to the altar, and repose the leftover species when communion has concluded. **Extraordinary Ministers may only approach the tabernacle to take communion for homebound distribution when Mass is not in progress.**
- Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion serving at Mass, must receive their vessel (ciborium or cup) from an Ordinary Minister (Bishop, Priest, or Deacon). They should not take the vessels from the altar themselves.

VII. **Conclusion**

This is, by no means, a comprehensive document on the norms for distribution of Holy Communion, and there will undoubtedly be additional circumstances that will occur and questions that will arise. When that happens, please do not hesitate to contact the director of the Office of Worship and also to consult the Church documents that will be listed at the end these guidelines. Remember to refer to the Decree dated September, 8, 2016 for the specifics of delegation and mandating Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. The *mandatum* cards that were distributed in the past for those who are parish Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will no longer come from the Diocese. However, if your parish wishes to continue

⁸ GIRM, 279

using these cards, please contact the Office of Worship: by phone at (609) 403-7171 or email worship@dioceseoftrenton.org. You will then be sent the template which can be used to print them in your parish or institution.

Rev. Michael Hall, Director
The Office of Worship
Diocese of Trenton

Resources for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments. *Redemptionis Sacramentum: On Certain Matters to be Observed or be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist*. Vatican City: March 25, 2004. Full Text in English.
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/ccdds/documents/rc_con_ccdds_doc_20040423_redemptionis-sacramentum_en.html

Pope Saint John Paul II. *On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest*. Vatican City, August 15, 1997. Full text in English.
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/laity/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html

Sacred Congregation of the Sacraments. *Immensae Caritatis: On Facilitating Reception Of Communion In Certain Circumstances*. January 29, 1973. Full text in English.
<https://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/CDWIMCAR.HTM>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. Washington: International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 2002.

_____. *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*. Washington DC: USCCB, April 7, 2002.