

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion Diocese of Baton Rouge - Office of Worship

These Guidelines are in effect for the Diocese of Baton Rouge, and for those men and women who have been chosen by their pastors to serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. These Guidelines offer both the practical details of service, and the theology surrounding this extraordinary service. Please contact the Office of Worship for further questions regarding the formation of those who serve in this ministry.

1. An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion [hereafter designated as EMHC] is a lay person who assists the Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion [a priest or deacon] in the distribution of Holy Communion.¹ This ministry is more than one of convenience or personal recognition. The EMHC assists and does not replace the Ordinary Minister [the ordained priest or deacon]. Those among the faithful who are chosen to be EMHC serve a special pastoral need. This role affirms the dignity and holiness of all the baptized. Men and women should be chosen for this role to manifest a wide diversity of age, race, economic condition, and marital status. In this light, those so chosen should understand the necessity of deferring to the ordained who are participating during the Communion Rite.

2. In the Diocese of Baton Rouge, pastors and chaplains are delegated by the Bishop the authority to approve a EMHC for service [and see also the situation mentioned in no. 4 below]. It is understood that a person who serves as an EMHC must be properly instructed for this ministry. The Diocesan Office of Worship can assist a parish and or institution in this kind of formation. The usual term of service for EMHC is three years, and is renewable. A person chosen to serve as an EMHC should be distinguished by a life of charity and prayer; should have the Eucharist as the center of his/her faith; and is to be a model of Catholic life to the entire Christian community. At the beginning of the term of service, it is appropriate that some “Commissioning Rite” be celebrated.²

3. At Mass:
 - a. EMHC are not to fulfill any other ministries at the Mass at which they distribute communion [e.g., lectors, ushers, cantors, gift-bearers]. They wear neither the liturgical garb of a priest or deacon, nor identifying medallions or scapulars; their attire and appearance should be neat and appropriate to the circumstances.³ There should be a sufficient number of ministers so that none should function at more than one Mass on a particular day, nor at every Mass attended.
 - b. An EMHC is not to be part of the Gathering Procession at Mass.⁴ The EMHC is to be present and participate fully at the mass during which s/he distributes Communion. Every EMHC should be seated in the Assembly during Mass preferably in a variety of locations, and with their families.
 - c. Typically, and according to custom, EMHC are to move into the sanctuary as soon as they have offered the Sign of Peace before the Fraction Rite. They should be in place before the Fraction Rite begins. They should not obscure the assembly’s view of the table of the altar or appear to be concelebrants. While they may be asked to bring to the altar vessels for use, this is preferably a service provided by altar servers. It would be

expected, as given in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal that Communion be given to the Assembly from the hosts consecrated at that Mass.⁵ EMHC should accomplish their ministry actions with grace, dignity, and quiet confidence so that the Assembly's prayerful participation at Mass is enhanced.

d. The presiding priest, assisted by a deacon or assisting priests, distributes the consecrated hosts into auxiliary vessels. The EMHC does not assist with this action during the Fraction Rite.

e. Communion is distributed according to the rubrics.⁶ Among these, please note:

1. The presiding priest receives Communion first, before Communion is distributed to the other ministers and the congregation. Concelebrating priests may self-communicate. The guiding principle for the distribution of Communion to all others is the following: a deacon or layperson must first receive Holy Communion before distributing Communion to others.⁷ Each parish and liturgical space will necessarily create the practical guidelines about the exact place for this procedure.

2. Communion should never be distributed hastily; reverence for the sacred species and the communicant means that the care in which the consecrated Sacred Host or Precious Blood is handled, friendly eye contact, posture, and tone of voice on the part of the EMHC enhances the moment of reception for the communicant. The communicant, and not the EMHC, is to decide whether or not to receive the consecrated host in the hand or on the tongue. Similarly, when communion from the chalice is offered, the communicant, and not the EMHC, is to decide whether or not to receive from the chalice. As a general rule, if a EMHC notices a communicant acting improperly [e.g. being irreverent with the Eucharistic species, wanting "self-intinction"] s/he should mention this to the pastor or chaplain after Mass for his prudent action.

3. Despite the attempt to provide communion from the gifts consecrated at that Mass, as indicated in the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*,⁸ there may be a need during communion to supplement the amount of consecrated Hosts available. If so, any EMHC may go to the tabernacle, remove the ciborium and make use of these consecrated Hosts as needed. After the communion procession is completed, the remaining Hosts, if not immediately consumed, are brought to the tabernacle by either the assisting priest, deacon or a EMHC. The purpose for keeping consecrated Hosts in the tabernacle is to bring Holy Communion to the sick, and for adoration.⁹

4. After the distribution of Communion, the Precious Blood may never be simply left at a side table or in the sacristy. Any Precious Blood remaining is to be consumed immediately and reverently; a EMHC and indeed any communicant may assist in this, which is most appropriately done at a side table, or even in the sacristy (the Precious Blood is never consumed while walking). If it is impossible to consume the quantity remaining during Mass, it is important that the Precious Blood be placed in the tabernacle until after the celebration, when it is to be consumed immediately.¹⁰ Under no circumstances may the Precious Blood be poured down the sacrarium.¹¹

5. Vessels used for Holy Communion are best not purified at the altar. They

should be brought to a side table and purified at that time, left covered there, or immediately brought to the sacristy to be purified later, according to the rubrics.¹² The purification of sacred vessels should not overly extend the time of quiet prayer after the Communion procession. Vessels are purified by a priest, deacon or instituted acolyte.¹³ EMHC may cleanse the vessels after they are purified.

4. In very special situations [e.g., when no other ministers are present but are clearly needed], the priest who presides at Mass may depute someone who has not been previously instituted in this ministry to assist him in distributing communion to the faithful at that Mass only. In this case, he is to use the short prayer found in the *Roman Missal* and as much as possible see to it that all other norms are observed.
5. On a weekday, in the unavoidable absence of a priest, an EMHC with the prior permission of the pastor or chaplain, may distribute Holy Communion to the faithful. In this case, the proper, official form of the celebration is to be followed.¹⁴ This would normally take place in emergency situations. If there is an unavoidable absence of a priest which occurs on a Sunday the *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*¹⁵ must be followed. Such a liturgy is led by a deacon, or in his absence an EMHC, and notice of this must be given to the bishop through the Chancery afterwards by the pastor.
6. The role of EMHC encompasses the function of bringing Holy Communion to the sick and homebound. Ideally, bringing Holy Communion to the sick will be done as an extension of the parochial celebration of Mass, especially on Sunday. This, however, can be done at other times as well.¹⁶ In this regard:
 - a. When an EMHC brings Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, the proper, official form of the celebration is to be followed.¹⁷ When this is done immediately following Mass, an appropriate ritual or at least some public mention of this at the conclusion of the Communion Rite of that Mass is advised.¹⁸
 - b. In bringing Holy Communion to the sick and to those unable to attend Mass within the parish or at an institution for which the EMHC is approved for service, the EMHC must have at least the presumed permission of the pastor or chaplain. A EMHC should not bring Holy Communion to persons elsewhere, even to fellow parishioners or family who may be hospitalized without at least the presumed permission of his/her own pastor or pastor's delegate.
 - c. EMHC are to know that they may, and indeed, must offer the Eucharist as Viaticum to those who are dying, using the proper ritual.¹⁹ The EMHC should alert the pastor of the need to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick to those who are seriously ill.
 - d. The Eucharist is to be carried and possessed by an EMHC only while directly bringing Communion to the sick. The Eucharist may not be reserved outside of a tabernacle overnight or for any longer than is clearly necessary.²⁰
7. In the absence of a cleric and with the expressed permission of the pastor, an EMHC may expose and repose the Eucharist in either a ciborium or a monstrance for adoration, and may

lead the faithful in prayer during this time. In such a case, the proper official form of the celebration is to be followed, noting that lay persons are not able to give the blessing [i.e., the “benediction”] as part of the ritual.²¹

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¹ Can. 230, §3 of the *Code of Canon Law*; *General Introduction of the Roman Missal* [2002], no. 162; *Inaestimabile Donum* [1988], no. 10.

² *Book of Blessings* [1989], nos. 1872-1896.

³ The alb is the vestment proper for all ordained and instituted liturgical ministers [*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 335.] However, in the Diocese of Baton Rouge it is not recommended that the alb be worn by EMHC. Clothes that are modest, clean and appropriate for the liturgical service should be worn by the EMHC.

⁴ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 120.

⁵ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 85.

⁶ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 83-87 and 155-163.

⁷ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 158-160.

⁸ *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 85.

⁹ *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass* [1973], no. 5.

¹⁰ *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* [2002], no. 52.

¹¹ *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion*, no. 55.

¹² *Redemptionis Sacramentum* [2004], no. 119; *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion*, no. 53.

¹³ Cf. the Letter from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (Prot. no. 468/05/L), in the *Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy Newsletter*, vol. 42, pp. 37-40.

¹⁴ *Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, esp. nos. 17, 20, 27-41, and 43-53.

¹⁵ Nos. 35-49.

¹⁶ *Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, nos. 14 and 16-17.

¹⁷ *Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, nos. 54-67, the *Rite of Distribution of Holy Communion in a Hospital Setting*

¹⁸ Contact the diocesan Office of Worship for models.

¹⁹ *Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, nos. 68-78; can. 911, §2; *Rite of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Chapter III, nos. 100-114, *Viaticum outside Mass*.

²⁰ Cann. 934-935.

²¹ *Rite of Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, nos. 91- 98.