

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**  
**ABOUT**  
**HOSPITAL AND HOMEBOUND MINISTRY**



Mt. 25:37

***“Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor are MASTERPIECES OF GOD’S CREATION, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect.”***

***Pope Francis, July 7, 2013***

Dear Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion,  
You have been called to a sacred service as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to bring the Eucharist to those who are homebound, in the hospital or nursing home. Through your ministry, the compassion and care of the Church is extended to our brothers and sisters who cannot be present at the Eucharistic Celebration with the whole community.

As extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, great care must always be taken to carry and handle the Body and Blood of Christ in a prayerful, respectful and reverent way. In addition to the spiritual aspects of this ministry there are medical, legal and social concerns to be aware of.

The guidelines found within these pages have been created in response to the concerns of extraordinary ministers. The list is not exhaustive and will not answer all questions for all situations. As questions arise, they should first be directed to your pastor who will guide and assist you.

Thank you for responding to God's call and participating in this very special ministry.

## ***Why are we called extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion?***

The word “extraordinary” means “outside the ordinary”. The “ordinary minister” is the bishop, priest and deacon. The extraordinary (out of the ordinary) minister is the layperson. Whenever there is a sufficient number of priests and deacons for distribution of Holy Communion, extraordinary ministers should not be appointed.

## ***How should an extraordinary minister prepare for distributing Holy Communion ?***

### Pray

The most important way to prepare for service in this ministry is through prayer. Pray for the needs of the people you will visit and for their families. Pray for those who care for the sick and pray for yourself that you may be a compassionate listener and a source of comfort.

### Proper Attire

Clean, neat, modest attire is always appropriate. As an extraordinary minister, the way you dress will speak of your reverence and of the sacredness of what you are doing.

Please be sure hands and fingernails are very clean to help stop the spread of bacteria.

### Communication

Call homebound parishioners ahead and let them know you are coming and when you will arrive. Keep contact information available in case an emergency cancelation must be made.

### Transportation

Have enough gasoline in your car before leaving for your visits. It is not appropriate to make stops while the Blessed Sacrament is with you.

### Materials

Carry copies of the parish bulletin with you to distribute.

If possible, have spiritual material available for those who will want it (prayer cards, booklets, etc.). Do not hand out material or purposefully leave material for non-Catholic family members or roommates unless they ask for it. This is not the focus of your visit.

You must have with you a book containing the rites for Communion to the Sick:

- *Communion of the Sick* (Catholic Book Publishing)

or

- *Pastoral Care of the Sick* (Liturgical Press).

These books may be purchased through the Rose Resource Center at the Diocesan Offices in Gaylord.

If you are visiting on a Sunday you may want the Gospel for the day with you.

Great care must be taken in carrying the pyx (the small round container used to carry the consecrated hosts). It is best to put the pyx in a burse (carrying pouch) and keep it on your person (around your neck) or in a very safe place.

Please have a purificator with you for emergency situations.

***How much conversation may we have when carrying the Eucharist?***

It is acceptable to smile or greet those you meet on your way. Phone conversations should only be held if it is absolutely necessary and it should be kept brief. Always be mindful of the most sacred presence you carry and the purpose of your ministry.

***May I stop for coffee, or other errands (gas station, post office, groceries) while I have the Eucharist with me?***

NO. This is not the time to do anything other than your ministry. It may be tempting to run into the store for an item or even fill up the gas tank but plan to do your errands at another time.

***Do I need to wash hands between rooms?***

YES. Wash hands before entering a room and immediately after leaving a room. Many people are in a fragile condition and need protection from germs. Hand sanitizer stations are in the hallways of most facilities. Please carry a small bottle of sanitizer with you in case you can't find a station.

***How should the Host be carried into the hospital rooms?***

The Host must be carried into each room in the pyx and remain in the pyx until distribution. Please do not leave the pyx with hosts in it outside the room unattended.

***What is a purificator and how is it used?***

The purificator is a cloth that is only used for Holy Communion. It is usually used to wipe the chalice when the Precious Blood is shared at Mass. Purificators are laundered in a specific way as the Precious Blood is often on them. They are rinsed first and the water is poured down the sacrarium (a

special sink in the sacristy that goes directly into the ground).

The purificator is used in hospital and homebound ministry to hold a host that is spit out or regurgitated. The Host is brought back to the church in the purificator.

***What is the proper procedure once back at the parish with the spit up or regurgitated Host?***

Place the Host in a glass of water until it is dissolved. When it is dissolved (or nearly dissolved), it may be poured into the sacrarium. Rinse the purificator and pour the water down the sacrarium and then it may be laundered as usual. Always notify the Parish Priest.

***What can the extraordinary minister do if a confused or sick person is having trouble swallowing the Host?***

A) Before distributing Communion to a patient that is confused or is very frail, ask the Nurse (not aide or other staff) and family if the patient can swallow and receive the Host.

B) If **NPO** is marked on the white board in hospitals it means: Nothing by Mouth (ask the nurse if this is

a current order).

C) Have water readily available to help the patient (some patients can only have thickened water).

D) Be especially aware of swallowing issues for stroke patients.

E) NEVER force someone to receive Holy Communion. If they appear not able, they are simply unable at this time. Pray a Spiritual Communion with them.

***May a Host be broken into a smaller piece for someone who has difficulty swallowing?***

Yes.

***Must the rites in the green book be followed in all circumstances? Is it OK to only pray the Our Father and distribute Holy Communion?***

The simple answer is NO. There are two rites available—Ordinary Circumstances and Holy Communion in Hospitals/Institutions. If a person is not conscious enough for the simple rite than he/she is not capable of receiving Holy Communion. Notify the Parish Priest or ministry coordinator if that situation arises.

***What is Communion in Ordinary Circumstances and when would it be used? How long does it take?***

## Outline of the Rite

### Introductory Rites

Greeting

Penitential Act

### Liturgy of the Word

Reading

Response

Universal Prayer

### Liturgy of Holy Communion

The Lord's Prayer

Communion

Silent Prayer

Prayer After Communion

### Concluding Rite

Blessing

The Rite normally takes approximately 15 minutes.

This Rite is used for when Communion can be celebrated in the context of a Liturgy of the Word.

This would be most appropriate for the homebound or in nursing homes when celebrated with a group.

A small table covered with a white linen cloth should be prepared for the Blessed Sacrament.

### ***When may a shorter alternative Rite be used?***

#### ***Communion in a Hospital or Institution***

The Introduction for Communion in a Hospital or Institution states:

“There will be situations, particularly in large institutions with many communicants, when the minister should consider alternative means so that the rite of Communion to the sick is not diminished to the absolute minimum.”

If it is convenient, however, the minister may add elements from the rite for ordinary circumstances, for example, a Scripture reading” (78).

“The rite begins with the recitation of the Eucharistic antiphon in the church, the hospital chapel, or the first room visited. Then the minister gives Communion to the sick in their individual rooms.

The concluding prayer may be said in the church, the hospital chapel, or the last room visited. No blessing is given” (79).

## Outline of the Rite

- Introductory Rite

  - Antiphon

- Liturgy of Holy Communion

  - Greeting

  - The Lord’s Prayer

  - Communion

- Concluding Rite

  - Concluding Prayer

Both the *Rite for Communion in Ordinary Circumstances* and the *Rite for Communion in a Hospital or Institution* are found in the ***Pastoral Care of the Sick*** book and the small ***Communion of the Sick*** booklet. You may want to highlight the rite in your book.

Note: Only a priest or deacon does the Sprinkling Rite which is included in the Introductory Rite in the books.

***Should the Sunday Gospel be read during Communion in Ordinary Circumstances?***

There are optional readings in the Rite book that may be used. An alternative to the provided texts is to read the Gospel designated for that Sunday.

***Should the EMHC enter an isolation room?***

Isolation rooms are to protect both the patient and everyone else. In general an EMHC should not enter an isolation room.

If for some reason you will be entering an isolation room, follow the posted guidelines by the patients door for wearing gloves, mask and gown.

If you are required to wear gloves, you must take off the glove when taking the Host out of the pyx and

sharing it with the patient. Then put your glove back on. (The reason for removing the glove before touching the Host is that crumbs may adhere to the glove...which then gets tossed into the trash).

\*A best practice would be to enter this room last and only with the one Host to be distributed to the patient.

***What is the best response if someone wants to receive Holy Communion but has not attended Mass for years?***

Ask them if they would like to speak with a priest before receiving Holy Communion. Help them set up an appointment. Follow through with the parish priest afterwards for instructions.

***What is the best response if someone were to share they were living in grave sin and wanted to receive Holy Communion?***

That is a difficult conversation but if a person knows s/he is in grave sin, they also probably know they should not receive. Offer to refer them to a priest. You may also offer to pray with them before you leave. Notify the parish priest.

***What is the best way to respond when someone shares they are not Catholic but wants to receive Holy Communion?***

Briefly tell them unfortunately at this time we do not have open Communion with those not in union with the Catholic Church. Offer to pray with them. (A blessing or anything else is not necessary).

***What does the extraordinary minister do with Hosts remaining after distribution?***

The remaining Hosts should be returned directly (no errands please) back to Church and place them in the ciborium in the Tabernacle. If you arrive at the Church and it is locked, you may consume the Hosts in your car, immediately and reverently.

***What do I do with the remaining crumbs in the pyx?***

Only priests, deacons or instituted acolytes may purify the sacred vessels. However, special permission has been given by the Bishop for the EMHC returning from hospital/homebound/nursing home visits to purify the pyx.

Consume the large crumbs. Put water in the pyx and drink the water. Do NOT pour it into the sink or sacrarium. Wash and dry the pyx.

***Why can't an extraordinary minister self communicate?***

Communion is a gift of the Lord, given to the faithful through the minister appointed for this purpose. Receiving Communion from a minister is not only a rule of the Church, but a practice that symbolizes the fact that we receive Jesus through the ministry of the Church. The extraordinary minister ideally received Holy Communion at Mass prior to visiting the sick.

***What is the best way to communicate with family (who may or may not be practicing Catholics) who are present about the rite and how they can participate?***

Briefly explain the order of what will take place and how they may participate with responses. In talking about the rite let them know that whomever is rightly disposed (practicing Catholic, not in grave sin, etc.) may receive Holy Communion.

***If you know some of the Catholic patients did not come to the community Communion service, should the EMHC go to their room at the conclusion of the service?***

Yes, it is good practice to check in on everyone and offer Holy Communion to them. It will be very much

You are responsible for the appropriate care of the consecrated Hosts and you are the one who knows the proper procedures.

### ***Additional Helpful Information***

- The Church is concerned about the protection of all involved, both patients and EMHCs. Therefore, two people going on homebound visits together is recommended.
- Never accept money. A homemade gift such as cookies is acceptable. If someone insists on giving money, take it to the parish as a donation and let them know this is what you are doing.
- Never give medication to the person you are visiting. Do not discuss the medication. Please keep your opinions about the person's condition to yourself.
- HIPPA law: HIPPA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) protects a patient's confidentiality.

Protected health information includes the patient's name, birthday, Social Security number, medical condition, medical records, date of admission, discharge or death.

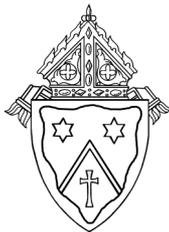
Letting other people know who is in the hospital is acceptable as long as there is no mention of illness or diagnosis.

## **Resources**

Commission on Aging  
Veterans Benefits  
Home Care Services  
Hospice Services  
Advance Care planning

## Notes

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SECRETARIAT FOR WORSHIP AND LITURGICAL FORMATION  
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