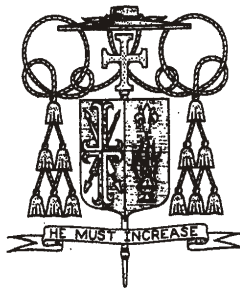


GUIDELINES FOR MINISTERS OF COMMUNION TO THE SICK

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"... and when we have finished the prayers, bread is brought and wine and water, and the president similarly sends up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his ability, and the congregation assents, saying the Amen. The distribution and the reception of the consecrated [elements] by each one takes place, and the deacons take them to the absent..."

~ Justin Martyr, First Apology, c. 155 AD.

Introduction: Our Eucharistic Community and Our Absent Members

Jesus always showed compassion for those who were ill. He cured the ten lepers, the centurion's servant, Peter's mother-in-law, the paralytic, the woman with the hemorrhage, and the man born blind. Indeed, wherever he went, great crowds came to him and "he cured the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute, and many others" (Mt 9: 3 5; 15:29-3 1).

The concern that Christ showed for the bodily and spiritual welfare of those burdened by illness is continued by the Church in its ministry to the sick. This ministry is the common responsibility of all Christians, who should visit the sick and hold them in prayer. Priests, deacons, medical professionals, friends, and family members have a particular share in this ministry of comfort. Through words of encouragement and faith, they help the sick to unite themselves with the suffering of Christ for the good of God's people (PCS #43).

Remembrance of the sick is always appropriate at common worship, especially on the Lord's Day, during the general intercessions at Mass, at Morning Prayer, and at Evening Prayer. Family members and caregivers should also be remembered on these occasions.

The parish office should be kept informed of the sick persons within the parish boundaries. This includes those who are in healthcare facilities or private homes. Visits from the priests, deacons, pastoral associates and parish volunteers should be scheduled regularly, but especially on the First Friday of each month and on Sunday, when the rest of the parish community gathers for worship.

The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the eucharistic community. In bringing Communion to them the minister of Communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at the Eucharist. For the sick, the reception of Communion is not only a privilege, but also a sign of support and concern shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill:

The links between the community's eucharistic celebration, especially on the Lord's Day, and the communion of the sick are intimate and manifold... The obligation to visit and comfort those who cannot take part in the eucharistic assembly may be clearly demonstrated by taking communion to them from the community's eucharistic celebration. This symbol of unity between the community and its sick members has the deepest significance on the Lord's Day, the special day of the Eucharistic assembly.

~ Pastoral Care of the Sick #73

The administration of Communion to the sick is a sacred ministry. In receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, the sick are united sacramentally to the Lord and with the eucharistic community from which illness has separated them. (PCS #51).

No Communion fast is necessary for the ill nor their caregivers. If their health or medical regimen allows them to consume the consecrated bread or wine, they may receive Communion at any time. If the sick wish to receive the sacrament of penance, it is preferable that the priest make himself available during a previous visit (PCS #75).

Along with the Eucharist, one might bring other items or gestures that keep the sick person "connected" to their parish family -- a bulletin, a tape of the homily, holy water, cards made by the parish school children, etc. The minister must also be sensitive to the needs of the family members and caregivers during this visit, assuring them of the love and support of the parish community. For more insights into visiting the sick, please read *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, nn.1-56.

Proper Training of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

The diocesan *Guidelines for Ministers of the Eucharist* (1992) state that every extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, whether they routinely distribute at Mass or to the sick, should be fully trained before they are commissioned. That training must include a theological understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist, the Mass and the Liturgical Year, as well as instruction on distribution and purification, and a review of the *Rite of Communion of the Sick* (HCWEOM, part II).

All extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion receive faculties from their diocesan bishop. In our diocese, I have deputed the Director of the Office of Worship to grant this permission. After adequate training and careful discernment, the pastor submits the ministers' names to the Office of Worship. The faculty is then granted and lasts for not more than two years. At the expiration of that period, the process is repeated. The names of all extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are kept at the Office of Worship, filed according to parish.

After the faculty has been granted, the pastor may celebrate the *Order of Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion* found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 63.

Family members, even when they have been charged with this duty temporarily or for only a single person, must also be adequately trained. At the very least, they should be instructed in the proper care of the Body and Blood of Christ and in the proper celebration of the *Rite of Communion of the Sick*. This document will serve as a useful tool for the pastor in these situations.



Reverence for the Eucharistic Species

The consecrated host should only be transported in a pyx (PCS #74). All pyxes, whether distributed to parish ministers or to family members, must be monitored. A parish records 1) to whom the pyx was given, 2) the name of the sick person(s) they will visit, 3) the date it was given out and 4) the time (even if months later) it was returned. This expresses our concern not about the pyx itself, but about the sick person and the amount of time he/she has been unable to join the Sunday assembly.

A consecrated host may not be kept on one's person or carried on a long journey unless there is urgent pastoral need (Canon 935) and the minister has the permission of the bishop. The Blessed Sacrament may not be stored overnight or for longer periods of time (Canon 934). Keeping several hosts to avoid visits to the parish church is strictly prohibited. If Communion is desired daily, parish ministers should be assigned to visit the sick person and his/her family.

Sick people not able to communicate under the form of bread may receive under the form of wine alone. If the wine is consecrated at a Mass not celebrated in the presence of the sick person, the Precious Blood is reserved in a properly covered vessel and placed in the tabernacle after communion (PCS #74). Only the amount necessary for the pastoral visit should be reserved and it should be used within the day. The Precious Blood is carried to the sick carefully to eliminate spilling. If some of the Precious Blood remains, it is consumed by the minister, who then purifies the vessel.

One of the main reasons for the tabernacle is so that the Blessed Sacrament be reserved for the sick. The tabernacle is always locked. The person in charge of the church or oratory safeguards the tabernacle key. (Canon 938.5). One or several people should be designated to care for the key and Eucharistic Ministers must have easy access to them.

THE RITES OF THE CHURCH FOR THE SICK AND THE DYING

Section 1: Rites which may be celebrated by an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

For complete texts, consult *Administration of Communion and Viaticum to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister (Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass, Chapter II, nn. 54-78)*. See also *Pastoral Care of the Sick (Part I, Chapter III, "Communion to the Sick")*.

Communion of the Sick in Ordinary Circumstances

This rite is used when routinely visiting the sick and their caregivers in the home or perhaps when a small community has gathered in a hospital or nursing home.

Introductory Rite
 Greeting
 [Sprinkling with Holy Water]
 Penitential Rite
 Liturgy of the Word
 Reading (reading of the day or John 6:51, 6:54-58, 14:6, 15:5, or 4:16)
 Response
 General Intercessions
 Liturgy of Holy Communion
 Lord's Prayer
 Communion
 Lamb of God
 Distribution of Communion
 Silent Prayer
 Prayer After Communion
 Concluding Rite
 Blessing

Rite of Communion of the Sick (Short Form)

This short rite is used when Communion is given in different rooms of the same building, such as in a hospital. The rite begins in the chapel or the first room. The minister is then escorted by someone carrying a candle. He recites the Lamb of God to all the sick people gathered in each room or to each communicant individually.

Antiphon
 Lamb of God
 Distribution of Communion
 Prayer After Communion

Viaticum

This rite is used when the person is in danger of death.

Introductory Rite
 Greeting
 Penitential Rite
 Reading of the Word of God
 Profession of Baptismal Faith
 Prayer for the Sick Person
 Viaticum
 Lord's Prayer
 Lamb of God
 Distribution of Communion
 Concluding Rite
 Concluding Prayer
 Sign of Peace



Sending Forth the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick

Just as the community of Justin Martyr (†166) cared for absent members, so, too, we bring Communion to the sick, who cannot join us in the Sunday assembly. This may be done on Sunday, by "sending out" our extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to the sick.

All ministers to the sick bring their pyxes to the sacristy before Mass. The pyxes are placed on a worthy tray. A small card is placed near each pyx, identifying the sick person (or the hospital) whom the minister will visit. The tray is placed in the worship space before Mass.

After the Communion procession, but before the Prayer After Communion, the pyxes are filled and the ministers are called forward. The use of this text is limited to the Diocese of Lansing.

After the extraordinary ministers have assembled in the sanctuary...

Presider: My brothers and sisters,
the Lord has nourished us with his body and his blood.
Now we commission you to take this eucharistic banquet
to our absent brothers and sisters
who are too ill to join us today.
Assure them of our constant love and concern
and our continuing prayers for healing and strength.

The extraordinary ministers depart the sanctuary and resume their place within the assembly.

This new ritual will make the assembly more aware of its absent members. Second, this avoids individual special requests in the Communion procession and, reflects our understanding of sacraments - as instruments of the Church, celebrated in a public manner, in the midst of the community or their representatives. Thirdly, this allows due care over who receives the pyx and the Eucharist. You might ask non-parishioners, who are visiting a sick relative in your parish, to stop in the sacristy to identify themselves before Mass. This would be a pastoral way of avoiding distribution of the Eucharist to unknown persons.

It is important to remember that ministers to the sick exercise their duties immediately after Mass. The visit to the sick by a eucharistic minister has priority over any other activities. One must avoid doing errands, dining out, or engaging in long conversations until the visit(s) to the sick are completed. Always be aware that you are carrying the Blessed Sacrament.

Conclusion

It is our duty and our privilege as ministers of the eucharist to share the Body and Blood of Our Lord with those who are ill. This sacrament is sign of our unity, a source of spiritual healing, and a means of reconciliation. As ministers of the Church, may we, too, be a sign of God's abiding love for all his children.



RESOURCES

Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Administration of Communion of the Sick (bilingual edition) (ICEL)

Publication # 5-303

Phone: 800-235-8722

New York: Catholic Book Publishing

Pastoral Care of the Sick - Rites of Anointing and Viaticum (© ICEL, 1972)

Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (© ICEL, 1976)

Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications

Rites of the Sick (compilation of prayers and rites)

Lord, I am not Worthy (Rite of Communion of the Sick in Ordinary Circumstances)

I Was Sick and You Visited Me (prayers for visits to the sick)

Phone: 800-933-1800

Lansing: Liturgical Commission Publishings

People's Participation Guide for *Communion of the Sick in Ordinary Circumstances*

Phone: 517-484-4449

Kansas City: National Catholic Reporter Publishing Company

The Caring Community (a Lectionary-based, monthly brochure to assist you in bringing the Word of God to those unable to celebrate with the Sunday assembly)

Phone: 800-333-7373

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