HANDBOOK FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION
NORMS AND GUIDELINES FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

July 25, 2018

Memorial of St. James the Greater, Apostle and Martyr

The distribution of Holy Communion at Mass is a sacred ministry of the ordained. However, when the need arises, fully initiated Christian men and women may be invited to collaborate in the ministry of the ordained to their sisters and brothers. In addition to bringing the sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ to the people of God, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion witness to faith in the real presence of Christ by their actions and by the dignity and reverence with which they treat the Body of Christ.

Therefore, with gratitude for their collaboration, the following policies regarding extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) are adopted for use in the Diocese of Tulsa in order to highlight the function and guide the task of those called to help bring the Eucharistic Presence of Christ to their sisters and brothers. These policies replace all previous diocesan policies concerning the ministry of EMHCs.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Who are Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs)?
They are men and women mandated by the Bishop of Tulsa to collaborate in the ministry of the ordained when a true pastoral need exists as determined by the pastor, parochial administrator, and a canonically assigned chaplain of an institution.

But I am confused, am I an Eucharistic minister or an EMHC?
“Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion” is the correct terminology. The phrases "Eucharistic” or “communion” minister blur the distinction between the ordained and the non-ordained. ¹ EMHCs are members of the laity who have received a mandate from the Bishop to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion when there is a genuine pastoral need. The responsibility of EMHCs is to assist in the reverent and orderly distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful at Mass in cooperation with the priest-celebrant and deacons. EMHCs do not distribute communion when a sufficient number of ordinary ministers (bishops, priests, deacons) are present.

Why do we even have EMHCs?
A genuine pastoral need may arise when the number of faithful receiving Holy Communion at Mass is so great that the liturgy would be unduly prolonged. Another need may arise when ordinary ministers are unable to administer Holy Communion conveniently because of poor health or advanced age, or when they are not available because they are fulfilling other duties. The need may also arise when it comes to ensuring that the sick and homebound have access to the Eucharist. In such cases,

¹ Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Redemptionis Sacramentum: On Certain Matters to Be Observed or to Be Avoided Regarding the Most Holy Eucharist, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 156, “This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not “special minister of Holy Communion” nor “extraordinary minister of the Eucharist” nor “special minister of the Eucharist”, by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.”
Church law allows for the naming of well-formed extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist, but not replace, the ordinary ministers.²

II. REQUIREMENTS, FORMATION, & MANDATION

How does one become an EMHC?

The pastor or the assigned chaplain of an Institution chooses men and women suitable for this collaborative ministry and prepares them by conducting the necessary formation, with the help of this resource. A written request is then made by the pastor, chaplain, or administrator to the Bishop (using the form available on the diocesan website), setting forth a description of the needs of the parochial (or other) situation, the names of candidates, an assurance that all those for whom mandation is being requested are of sufficient Christian maturity with a definite relationship to the parish or institution to be served, whose character and way of life “reflect a devotion to the Eucharist, and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their reverence” and moral commitment that they are worthy of this immense task.³

What are the requirements to be an EMHC?

All candidates must be at least age 18. They must be fully initiated into the Church with the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, must always ensure that their lives are in conformity with the teachings of the Church including the teaching on married life, and publicly affirm the magisterium of the Church. Candidates should be able to physically exercise this ministry.


What kind of classes do I need to become an EMHC?
Pastors, chaplains, and administrators are responsible that individuals be given sufficient formation and training for the role to be undertaken. Instruction in the theology of the Eucharist, the proper nature of this ministry as extraordinary, and prayerful Eucharistic spirituality should augment the training required for all EMHCs.

I already am an EMHC. Do I still need to take a class?
EMHCs should receive, on a regular basis, ongoing theological and spiritual formation for this holy and important undertaking. Minimally, this formation occurs once every three years; yearly formation is highly encouraged.

Can I be an EMHC at a parish I am visiting?
EMHCs are mandated to serve only in the particular parish or institution designated and may not minister outside or beyond the parameters of their appointment. EMHCs may function both in a parish and/or institution, but only with the proper mandate from the Bishop for each location. Nursing Homes and hospitals which are served by a particular parish are included in the mandate for that parish. In cases of emergency, however, and for a specific occasion, all priests may appoint extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to serve on that occasion alone (See Roman Missal, Appendix III).

How long can I be an EMHC?
One receives mandation to serve in this capacity for up to a three-year period, depending on when one receives the mandate. Continuation of service should not be presumed, but rather specifically determined by the pastor prior to renewal. Each mandate may be revoked at any time at the discretion of the Bishop or the pastor. The EMHC may determine not to complete his/her term of the mandate at any time, after consultation with the pastor. The mandate is also terminated if the person leaves the parish or institution.
Is there a blessing or commissioning ceremony for EMHCs?

EMHCs should be commissioned at their parish or institution according to the "Order of Commissioning Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion," which is found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter 63.

If I sing in the choir or help usher/reader can I also be an EMHC at the same Mass?

Pastors and chaplains should develop the full complement of liturgical ministries that function in the celebration of the Mass. Therefore, it is preferable that EMHCs do not serve as readers, ushers, altar servers, or choir members at the same Mass.

It is getting harder for me to help EMHC because of my physical condition, what should I do?

When an individual’s capability to function well as an EMHC is inhibited due to illness or age, mandation is not to be requested. They might be invited to serve the parish in some other way.

I want to bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, how do I do that?

EMHCs may also be designated for ministry to the sick and homebound of the parish to allow more frequent reception of communion than would otherwise be possible. Such individuals are to be instructed in the use of the rite of giving Holy Communion to the sick found in *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, Chapter III. Additional formation as to the procedures and protocol for visiting those in hospitals should be given by the priest or deacon in charge of coordinating the homebound ministry. In addition, EMHCs to the homebound must be covered volunteers who have completed CYP requirements according to the Child and Youth Protection Policies of the Diocese of Tulsa.
What about bringing communion to those in jail/prison?
EMHCs may also assist in jail or prison ministry. They are to be particularly attentive and sensitive to the inmates in explaining the guidelines for reception of Holy Communion and to carry out communion services reverently and in such a way as not to confuse the service with the celebration of the Mass.

I just received the pyx at Mass to take Holy Communion to the homebound. Oh, but there is Mary Agnes and I have to know how her grandson did at the ball game. Should I stop and chat with her or go directly to the homebound person?
EMHCs should immediately go from the parish Mass to the communion call. It is a beautiful connection between the Eucharist that just has taken place in the parish and the reception of Holy Communion by the homebound parishioner.

How am I supposed to distribute Holy Communion to those with gluten intolerance?
Each parish has its own way of handling this situation. Pastors should instruct EMHCs how to handle this according to their local parish’s protocol. Other institutions are to refer the matter to the assigned chaplain or to the Divine Worship Office of the diocese.
III. PREPARATION BEFORE THE LITURGY

Recognizing that each parish has its own particular details of design and need, here are universal considerations for EMHCs and their ministry:

The Principle of Prayer:
All ministerial service should begin and end with humble and grateful prayer.

The Principle of Attentiveness and Flexibility:
Faithfulness in liturgical ministry demands attention to details and readiness to adapt to changing circumstances.

The Principle of Reverence and Uniformity:
All actions and words in ministry should be in union with and directed by the celebrant in a generous spirit of loving service to the whole Eucharistic Assembly.

1. On ministry days, begin the day in prayer and quiet seeking to be recollected to the service you will be performing that day.

2. Care should be taken against casual actions, attitudes and language that distract from the celebration. Care should also be taken regarding appropriate dress.

3. It is recommended that you arrive early to your parish liturgy at which you are scheduled to serve, allowing you to be informed of any special circumstances that might occur. This also ensures that the priest, deacon, servers, musicians, and EMHCs conduct their roles with intentionality and gracefulness because all are aware of their specific responsibilities for the celebration. Additionally, some parishes may have you assist in sacristan duties as well.
IV. DURING THE LITURGY: COMMUNION RITE

**The Fraction of the Bread:**

The priest-celebrant breaks the consecrated bread and places it in other vessels if necessary. This ritual action is a gesture of our Lord’s at the Last Supper. It is reserved only to the priest-celebrant, “with the assistance, if the case requires, of the deacon or a concelebrant.”

EMHCs approach the sanctuary after the priest receives Communion, but should not do so in a way that sets them "apart from the other faithful as though concelebrants.”

Local custom determines where EMHCs stand and wait. They receive Communion from the priest and deacon. They do not receive Holy Communion at the same time as the priest, and they never wait to receive Communion following the assembly.

When receiving Communion, just like the rest of the faithful, EMHCs are to show a sign of reverence. The U.S. Bishops Conference has determined that the sign of reverence is a simple bow of the head before receiving both the Body and Blood of Christ.

**How to Minister the Body of Christ:**

EMHCs each receive a sacred vessel “from the hand of the priest-celebrant [or deacon] himself”; they do not take any vessel from the altar. They may participate in distributing Holy Communion to their fellow extraordinary ministers. They move to their assigned

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6 U.S. Norms, 38-40.

7 GIRM, 162.
communion station with reverence and dignity. As the communicant approaches the host is offered to the communicant with the words, “The Body of Christ.” And the communicant responds “Amen.” Nothing else is said (such as the communicant’s name). The communicant chooses whether to receive the Body of Christ on the tongue or in the hand.

How to Minister the Blood of Christ:

EMHCs are given a communion chalice by the priest or deacon; they do not take them from the altar. They should receive from the chalice if they are to distribute it to others. As those who desire to receive the Blood of Christ come forward, the chalice is offered to the communicant with the words, “The Blood of Christ.” The communicant responds “Amen,” and the chalice is handed to them. After they return the chalice, the rim is wiped with a purificator. The chalice is rotated slightly; the purificator is adjusted to an unused part of the linen, and then the chalice is presented to the next communicant. The chalice is never passed from one communicant to another.

A communicant is never allowed to self-communicate by intincting the host in the chalice and is not permitted to pass the chalice to another communicant. The act of intinction, can only be ministered by a priest or bishop. An EMHC, may stand next to the priest or bishop and hold the chalice employed in the act of distributing Holy Communion by intinction.

While distributing the Precious Blood, never pour the Blood from one chalice to another, so as to fill an empty chalice with Precious Blood at a communion station.

Following the Distribution of Holy Communion:

EMHCs return the ciborium/chalices to the altar or credence table. Depending on your parish—the tabernacle may be outside the sanctuary—you may be asked to bring your ciborium to the tabernacle. Any remaining Precious Blood must be consumed at the end of the distribution of Holy Communion by the ordinary ministers, who may be assisted
by the EMHCs. EMHCs who distributed the hosts should purify their fingers in an ablution cup.

**Purifying Sacred Vessels:**
The purification of the sacred vessels may occur at the altar by the priest, or at the credence table by the deacon or instituted acolyte, or cleansed immediately after Mass by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte. If they are to be cleansed after Mass, the vessels are suitably covered at the credence table on a corporal.\(^8\) Purification is performed only by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte.\(^9\) EMHCs may assist sacristans in conducting a more complete hygienic washing after the vessels have been purified. It is important to remember that these are sacred vessels—not ordinary “dishes.”

\[\text{Image} \]

**V. ADDITIONAL REMARKS**

**Dropped Host or Spilt Precious Blood**
If a Host or some particle of it falls, it should be picked up reverently by the EMHC. He/she may consume it immediately or hold it until distribution is finished and then consume it. It should not be placed in the paten or given to the communicant or placed in the sacrarium. Soiled hosts may be completely dissolved in water which is then poured into the sacrarium by the priest or deacon.

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\(^8\) GIRM, 183.

\(^9\) GIRM, 279.
If the Precious Blood is spilled from the chalice, the area should be immediately covered with a purificator. Then the area should be washed with a purificator and the water poured into the sacrarium by the priest or deacon.

**Blessings**

In recent years, the practice has developed that those not receiving communion join in the communion procession to receive a blessing from the minister. For those communities which have elected to follow such a practice, the following should be kept in mind:

- EMHCs should not bless with a gesture or formula used by clerics. For example, they should not make the sign of the cross over someone while using the Trinitarian formula. They should instead invite the person to make an Act of Spiritual Communion by saying, “Receive the Lord Jesus in your heart” with or without a light touch of the shoulder as appropriate, being considerate of hygienic concerns.
- Likewise, no one (cleric or lay) should give a blessing with the host in their hand, simulating Benediction.

**Guardianship of the Eucharist**

All Catholics who present themselves must be given communion. If an EMHC is concerned about a person receiving communion, he/she should discuss the matter with the pastor after Mass but not deny the person communion if they are Catholic.

EMHCs also share responsibility for guarding the Eucharist from profanation. EMHCs who assist in distributing the hosts should be diligently aware that each communicant consumes the host before departing their presence, even following the communicant and insisting they consume or return the host if necessary.

Pastors sometimes give family members permission to take communion home to another family member. In such cases they should be instructed as EMHC’s so as to
eliminate as much as possible the circumstance of anyone who is not a mandated EMHC presenting a pyx at communion time to receive a host.

It is strictly forbidden to pour the Precious Blood into the ground or into the sacrarium, or to bury consecrated hosts in the ground.

VI. EMHCs Visiting Institutions and Homes

Taking the Eucharist to institutions (hospitals, nursing homes, other health care facilities, or prisons) and homes is an extension of the Eucharistic Celebration of the community at Mass.

The function of the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion in the pastoral care of the sick or to prisoners is to bring the Eucharist to a member of the parish community who is confined and cannot participate in the communal celebration and to extend charity in whatever way is possible or needed. Therefore:

1. The EMHC is a representative of the parish bringing to another member the love, concern, and prayers of the community.

2. The EMHC may be ministering only to the person confined, or to that person and other members of the household. Since the visit of the EMHC is not meant to be a substitute for one's participation in the Eucharist, others should be encouraged to participate, but not to use the visit as a substitute for Mass. The EMHC should, however, be sensitive to the presence of others and involve them in the rite.

3. The visit by the EMHC includes the rite of reception of Holy Communion as presented in the rite for giving Holy Communion to the sick found in Pastoral Care of the Sick, Chapter III (i.e., the green ritual book).

4. The visit is an opportunity to ask the individual if there is a need for a visit by a priest for the Sacraments of Reconciliation or Anointing of the Sick.
Reverence for the Eucharistic Species by the EMHC

1. Go directly from the church to the institution or home.
   - no shopping or visiting on the way
   - do not keep the Blessed Sacrament in your home or vehicle

2. After the communion call, any remaining elements of the sacred species are to be immediately returned to the church and the pyx is to be purified.

3. A host that has fallen should may be immediately consumed or, if it is soiled, be carefully returned to the parish church and the pastor notified, and placed in the ablution jar next to the tabernacle until it has dissolved. The water may then be poured down the sacrarium by a priest or deacon.

4. Dress according to your ministry and the purpose of your visit - with dignity and common sense.

Skills Needed for the Pastoral Visit

1. In bringing Holy Communion to the sick, you are collaborating in the ministry of the ordained to be a messenger of God's love—reflect that love.

2. *Listen* to the needs of the person you visit and the family, if present.

3. *Reflect* sincere concern for the person you visit.

4. Be willing to *pray*.

5. Be unhurried and sensitive, without staying too long, noting the energy level of the person you are visiting.

Visiting Health Care Institutions

1. Learn what you can about the person before visiting.

2. Visit by yourself or in pairs; not in groups and keep the visit short.

3. Identify yourself to the person in charge:
a. Find out visiting hours
b. Make appointments if necessary
c. Become familiar with the best times to visit:
   - Not during meals, doctors' visits or treatment time
   - Your schedule should be flexible—if you arrive at an inopportune time, come back later
d. Watch for "NO VISITORS," "NPO" (Nothing through the mouth), or "ISOLATION" signs - Consult the nurse in charge about these.
e. Knock before entering or even going around the curtain.
f. Assess the situation and adapt to the person's needs:
   - Introduce yourself
   - Sit or stand so you are in a comfortable line of vision for the person in bed
   - Do not wake people who are sleeping soundly
   - Be aware of apparatus around the bed
   - Put the needs of those you visit over your own
g. Don't rush the visit, but keep it within the limits of the sick person's stamina.
h. Make an appointment for a return visit if desired.

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ANIMA CHRISTI
Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me.
O Good Jesus, hear me
Within thy wounds, hide me
Never let me be separated from thee
From the wiles of mine enemy, defend me
And at the hour of my death, call me
That with the angels and saints
I might praise thee
Forever and ever. Amen.