

❧ Appendix I ❧

Frequently Asked Questions

A Handout for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Why are laypersons called “Extraordinary Ministers” of Holy Communion? The word, extraordinary, does not refer to a person’s talents or gifts, but rather refers to the fact that the “extraordinary minister” is not the usual minister of Holy Communion. The “ordinary minister” or usual minister of Holy Communion is the priest (and deacon), and the “extraordinary minister” is a layperson.

What if a priest is concelebrating or a deacon is assisting at Mass, who has priority to distribute Holy Communion? Ordained ministers are the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, even if other laypersons are scheduled to distribute. There may be occasions when an unexpected priest is concelebrating at Mass, and therefore, an assigned extraordinary minister will need to relinquish his/her role at that particular liturgy.

Are Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion allowed to assist the priest at the altar during the breaking of the bread? No. The breaking of the bread is reserved to the priest, assisted by the deacon. The breaking of the bread takes place during the singing of the Lamb of God and should be a clear sign to the faithful of the one bread broken for the world. However, when there is great need and there are a number of Eucharistic vessels, a layperson may assist the priest by handing him the vessels and arranging them on the altar.

Are extraordinary ministers permitted in the sanctuary area? Yes. EMsHC may enter the sanctuary to receive Holy Communion and their vessels. Care should be taken so that such movement does not interrupt the gesture of “the breaking of the bread”. Once in the sanctuary, they should stand some distance away from the altar so they do not have the appearance of being concelebrants. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not to be given Communion until after the priest, concelebrants (if any), and the deacon have received.

Is it appropriate for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to receive Communion under the form of bread only? If Holy Communion is being distributed under both kinds, it is most appropriate for the EMHC to receive Holy Communion under both kinds, unless he/she is unable to do so because of health or some other good reason.

Is it permissible to use a person’s name when distributing Holy Communion? The words that are to be used when distributing the host are, “The Body of Christ,” and the words to be used when distributing the Precious Blood are, “The Blood of Christ.” No other words are to be added.

What is intinction and is it permitted? Intinction is a method of distributing Holy Communion under both forms. The minister takes a host and dips it into the Precious Blood and then gives the host to the communicant who receives it on the tongue. It is never permitted for a communicant to self-communicate by taking the host and dipping it into the Precious Blood. A minister must always give Communion under either form. While intinction by a minister is permitted, it is not the preferred form of distribution of Holy Communion in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

What if a person kneels to receive Holy Communion? The General Instruction of the Roman Missal states that the posture for reception of Holy Communion in the United States is standing. However, if a communicant comes forward and kneels, the minister should give Communion to that person.

Is it appropriate for the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to consume any remaining Precious Blood? Yes. The Precious Blood must be consumed. It is preferable to consume any remaining Precious Blood immediately following Communion. However, if a significant amount remains, the Precious Blood may be placed on the credence table with a purificator placed over it. Then immediately following Mass, ministers over the age of 21 should assist in consuming the remaining Precious Blood.

Can the Precious Blood be reserved in the tabernacle? The Precious Blood may not be reserved in the tabernacle unless it is being reserved for a sick person who is unable to receive the Host. If this is the case, however, the Precious Blood should be placed in a well-sealed container in order to avoid the possibility of spilling. If there is any Precious Blood remaining after the sick person has received, the minister should consume the rest of it. The container should be properly purified.

Can an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion assist the priest by placing the remaining hosts in the tabernacle? Yes. If the tabernacle is some distance from the altar (e.g. in a Blessed Sacrament Chapel), then an EMHC may take the ciborium of hosts and place them in the tabernacle.

What should an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion do when a non-communicant comes forward to “receive a blessing?” There is no rubric or directive that foresees non-communicants coming forward in the Communion procession. However, in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati out of pastoral sensitivity, an EMHC may silently trace the sign of the cross on the forehead of persons who come forward, but are unable to receive Holy Communion. The EMHC, however, does not say any words while tracing the sign of the cross on the forehead.

What if someone comes forward with a pyx and asks for additional hosts? In the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, those who take Holy Communion to the sick and homebound are to be called forward after the Prayer After Communion. The minister receives the pyx with the appropriate number of Hosts at that time and are sent forth by the community. Therefore, hosts should not be placed in a pyx in the Communion procession.

Is it appropriate for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to deny Holy Communion? Never. It is not the place of an EMHC to determine the worthiness of a communicant.

