

# Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion/Eucharistic Ministers

**What** (is the ministry? How did it come into being?)

In 1971, extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist were first permitted in the United States. At that time, the Congregation of the Sacraments responded to a request of the American bishops to allow laypersons to assist priests in distributing Holy Communion.

In January 1973, Pope Paul VI extended this permission to the entire Church. He wrote, "Present-day conditions demand that greater access to Holy Communion should be made possible so that the faithful, by sharing more fully in the fruits of the sacrifice of the Mass, might dedicate themselves more readily and effectively to God and to the good of the Church. First of all, provision must be made lest reception become impossible or difficult owing to a lack of a sufficient number of ministers."

The institution of this ministry responds to the conditions in the Church today: Catholics are encouraged to share in communion at every Eucharist in which they participate.

- From the first days of the celebration of Eucharist, Holy Communion consisted of the reception of both Bread and Wine in response to Jesus' command to "take and eat ... take and drink." The practice of Communion under both Bread and Wine at Mass continued until the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, when the custom of distributing the Eucharist under the form of Bread alone began to grow. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, theologians speak of Communion with Bread alone as a "custom" of the Church. In 1963, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council authorized that Communion be distributed as both Bread and Wine at the Bishop's discretion.

**Why** (is it important?)

Eucharistic Ministers help the communion rite take place in a timely fashion, but this ministry is not just a matter of efficiency. When "going to communion" takes a long time, the communion rite loses its association with the Eucharistic prayer and the breaking of the bread.

Two excellent resources emphasize the importance and spirituality of this ministry

- [This article](#) reflects powerfully on the work and spirituality of Eucharistic Ministers
- [This YouTube video](#) discusses not only the history of this ministry but some practical suggestions about exercising it.

**Who** (can serve and is served?)

Ministers are people who follow a Christian life of service to others, have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist, and are joyful and grateful witnesses who give thanks for life's blessings and bring God's presence to others. Training is required so that ministers understand and perform their responsibilities appropriately.

**When** (is the ministry to be carried out?)

During the celebration of the Eucharist/Mass or during a Communion service

**How** (is the ministry performed?)

***Before Mass:***

1. Pray for God's gift of peace, confidence, and generosity.

*Blessed are you, God of all creation!  
I thank You for calling me to serve Your holy people.  
May I see You in them. May they see You in me.  
Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen*

**OR**

*God of Love and Mercy.  
With reverence and humility, I approach the Eucharist and this  
ministry.  
Grant me the grace to help others encounter You in this sacrament.  
I ask this through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

2. Dress appropriately and simply.
3. Arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.
4. Sign in with the Mass Coordinator for a specific station. If you have not been assigned as a Eucharistic Minister, but can serve as a substitute, please sign in as a sub.
5. Check with the Mass Coordinator about any changes (for example, extra priest or deacon)

***During Mass***, participate fully by singing, praying, listening, etc.

***During the Communion Rite:***

1. Come to the altar platform immediately after the Sign of Peace; stand facing the altar.
2. If you have signed in as a Bread minister for Station #1 or are the minister for Station #5, please stand behind the altar on one of the two *inner* spots marked by tape.
3. If you have signed in as one of the two Chalice ministers for Station #1, please stand behind the altar on one of the *outer* two spots marked by tape.

4. After the priest has received both consecrated Host and Wine,
  - The ministers on the inner spots marked by tape (one of the Bread ministers for Station #1 and the minister for Station #5) step forward to receive first Host, then Wine. The priest will then give these two ministers Patens (bowls). These two ministers will distribute to the other ministers. After all the ministers have received, the minister for Station #1 goes to the Station #1; the minister for Station #5 returns the Paten (bowl) to the altar, and goes to the Eucharistic Chapel to bring the Ciborium to the altar.
  - Immediately after they receive the Host, the two ministers on the outer spots marked by tape (the two ministers of the Chalice for Station #1) step up to the altar to receive from the Chalice from the priest and distribute the Chalice to other ministers. After all the ministers have received, these ministers go to Station #1
5. After ministers not on the spots marked by tape have received, they approach the altar to tell the priest whether they will distribute from the Paten (bowl) or Chalice. Then they go to their assigned station.
6. Ministers walk reverently to their station, holding the sacred vessels with both hands and face the altar.
7. When a minister with a Paten (bowl) and two ministers with Chalices are in their places, the ministers turn to face the communicants and begin distributing.
8. If ministering the Chalice, stand far enough away from other ministers to avoid congestion and to allow the Communion procession to move.
9. Be alert to the ways in which individuals approach Communion
  - Be friendly in your approach, and look at each person.
  - Allow each person time to reverence the Sacrament with a bow of the head.
  - The Bishops have designated *standing* as the posture for receiving Communion. However, do not deny Communion to anyone who kneels.
  - When distributing Communion, say ***The Body of Christ*** or ***The Blood of Christ***. Do not change these words or use the individual person's name when sharing Communion.
  - People may receive the consecrated Host in the hand or on the tongue.
  - Allow time for the communicant to say "Amen" before presenting the Host or the Chalice.
  - After each person receives from the Chalice, dry the rim of the Chalice with the purificator/cloth. Then turn the Chalice ¼ turn. Unfold the purificator so there is a clean surface for the next communicant.
  - Keep your voice loud enough for the communicant to hear, but not so loud as to distract others who are receiving Communion.
  - Some adults and children will come to your station with arms across their chests; lay a hand on their head or use some other

appropriate gesture to give them a blessing. You can say: "May the peace of Christ be with you!" or another appropriate formula.

- Some communicants bring Communion to those unable to come to church. They will have a pyx (small container to hold the Host) and ask you for the number of Hosts they need. If they don't have a pyx, have them talk to the Priest after mass, do not give them an extra host.
  - Make sure all who want to receive have done so. You may need to bring the Bread and Wine to people who are unable to walk to the front of Church. The ushers or ambassadors will let you know if this is needed.
10. When the Chalice is empty or all have received, take the Chalice to the sacristy, put it on the tray near the sink, and put the purificator in the laundry bag in the corner. If Precious Blood remains in the Chalice after all have received, **reverently** consume it in the sacristy (or ask another minister to do so). Return to your place in Church.
11. If your Paten (bowl) runs out and more communicants remain, motion to the minister of Station #5 (who will be standing on the side of the altar, near the ambo), and that minister will bring you a replenished Paten (bowl). When all have received, return the Paten (bowl) to the altar and return to your place.

**Accidents:** Keep a calm demeanor.

If you or a communicant drops a Host, first, reassure the person in front of you. Then, pick up the dropped Host, being careful not to spill more Hosts in the process. You might have to stop others in line before you can pick it up. Do so courteously, remembering that Jesus is also present in the members of the assembly. Keep the Host in your hand and when all have received, give it to the minister for Station #5 when you return the sacred vessel to the altar. The Station #5 minister will either consume the fallen Host or give it to the priest to consume.

If you or the communicant spill Precious Blood, first, reassure the person in front of you. Then cover the spill with your purificator and step in front of the spill, so no one steps on the Precious Blood. Motion to the minister from Station #5 (who will be standing at the altar) that you need another purificator.

### ***Special instructions for the Minister of Station #5***

1. As is outlined above, the minister of Station #5 comes to the platform, stands on one of the two *inner* spots marked with tape, and steps forward after the priest receives Communion Bread and Wine. You receive Bread and Wine from the priest; then the priest will hand you a Paten (bowl), and you will distribute Bread to other ministers. When all the ministers have received, you return the Paten (bowl) to the altar and retrieve the tabernacle key from the altar servers table, and go to the Eucharistic Chapel.

2. When you enter the Eucharistic Chapel, genuflect, use the key to open the tabernacle, and remove one Ciborium and its top. Reverently, carry the Ciborium at chest-level to the altar, and put the Ciborium on a white linen cloth (corporal) on the side of the altar near the ambo and remove its top. Stand between the ambo and the altar, so that you can see all the stations.
3. Your primary work during the Communion Rite is to ensure that ministers have Hosts to distribute.
4. Reverently, remove some of the Hosts from the tabernacle Ciborium and put them in the empty Paten (bowl) on the corporal. Keep an eye on the stations: If ministers need more Hosts, they will motion to you, and you will exchange their empty Paten (bowl) with one filled with Hosts.
5. You may find that you need to replenish several Patens (bowls) in short order, so keep replenishing the empty Patens (bowls) the ministers give you.
6. When all the congregation has received, ministers return their Patens (bowls) to the altar. Step aside, so the priest can put all the remaining Hosts into one Ciborium. The priest puts the top on the Ciborium and gives it to you. You reverently return the Ciborium to the tabernacle in the Eucharistic Chapel, lock the tabernacle, genuflect, bring the key to its hook in the sacristy, and return to your pew.

Please reread the section on accidents (above). Spills are rare, but you have important responsibilities should they occur.