



The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion Notes for Training at the Parish

The Meaning of the Term

1. The term “Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion” is the appropriate term for members of the lay faithful who are called upon to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion either within the Eucharistic celebration or at another occasion such as a Communion Service or a visit to the homebound. “Ordinary Ministers” of Holy Communion are bishops, priests or deacons, in addition to installed acolytes.

We use the term “extraordinary” because the ministers assist the ordinary minister in facilitating a smoother or more graceful distribution of Holy Communion than would otherwise be possible due to the number of communicants. On some occasions, the Extraordinary Minister may not be necessary due to a sufficient number of ordinary ministers present or the small size of the congregation. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should never see their role as a right or position of power. Rather, their ministry is a true service to the community, and should be exercised in a spirit of docility and generosity.

The Qualifications

2. The service of an EMHC is essentially connected to the Holy Mass. It is therefore necessary that the EMHC be a practicing Catholic, fully initiated. They should also be at least 16 years of age. If married, the EMHC should be in a marriage that is recognized by the Church. Ideally, the candidate should also have a deep and obvious love for the Blessed Sacrament, and should be known in the community as someone who is committed to the Church’s understanding of the Real Presence.

Some Basic Principles

3. EMsHC should be reminded in their training of the Church's clear teaching regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Jesus is truly present, body, blood, soul and divinity in the Eucharistic Species. Because of this, the highest level of respect and reverence is due to the Blessed Sacrament. Such respect needs to be shown to the Consecrated Species by ensuring that one's appearance and dress conveys dignity and an awareness of the sanctity of the Eucharist, as well as by manifesting signs of devotion outside of one's service at Holy Mass, especially by genuflection or a profound bow when in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. Time before the Blessed Sacrament in silent prayer should also be part of the EMHCs regular spiritual life.

Service at Holy Mass

4. The Church is eager to manifest within the Mass the distinction between the priest celebrant and the EMHC. Of course, this is not a distinction of worth, but one of service. The EMsHC should never take the sacred vessels containing the Sacred Species from the altar themselves. Rather, these vessels should be handed to the EMHC by one of the priests present or by the deacon. Once the EMHC has received the vessel, however, the EMHC may begin to distribute Holy Communion, including to one's fellow EMHC.

EMsHC should be reminded that they are not to give blessings to the faithful. Should a child or member of the faithful request such a blessing, the simple invocation "May God bless you" should be used without the sign of the cross.

EMsHC should be instructed as to what is expected and appropriate in the case of an accident involving the Sacred Species, such as when the Blessed Sacrament is dropped or the Sacred Blood is spilled.

In the case of a dropped host, the EMCH should ideally consume it immediately as a sign of respect for the Blessed Sacrament. If, however, this is not possible or prudent, the host should be brought immediately to a side table or the tabernacle and placed in a small vessel of water to dissolve. While this demands a pause to the distribution of Holy Communion, it can also serve as a

moment of silent catechesis on the dignity and care we owe to the Blessed Sacrament.

In the case of a spill of the Precious Blood, the EMHC should stop distribution immediately and tend to the spill, making certain no one walks on the Precious Blood, perhaps assisted by the ushers. Purificators should be used to clean the spill immediately, which should of course be washed in the sacrarium.

EMsHC should be reminded that they may not purify the sacred vessels, and should not consume what remains of the Precious Blood themselves. Rather, if a portion of the Precious Blood remains following the Communion Rite, the Precious Blood should be distributed to the other EMsHC. Self-intinction by the EMHC is not permitted.

Visits to the Sick and Homebound

5. It is not always possible for the pastor or his clerical delegate to visit the sick and homebound of the parish on a regular basis. In these cases, the use of EMsHC to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion to the homebound can be of tremendous benefit. While the pastor should always make certain that the needs and spiritual health of his flock are being monitored, availing himself generously to requests for the anointing of the sick and confession by the homebound, commissioning specific members of the community to regularly visit the sick and homebound is always an option so that no member of the community is unduly deprived of the graces of Holy Communion.

EMsHC making visits to minors or vulnerable adults must have completed the “essential three” before visiting these individuals in their homes or at the hospital. The “essential three” include certifiable Virtus training, signing of the Code of Conduct, and the satisfactory completion of a background check. Any questions regarding these necessary qualifications should be addressed to the Chancellor for Civil Affairs.

The Sacred Hosts should ideally be retrieved following Holy Mass. If this is not possible, the EMHC is to make arrangements for the pastor or his clerical delegate to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle. Except in cases of necessity or emergency, the EMHC should not retrieve the hosts themselves from the tabernacle.

While making pastoral visits, the EMHC is to remember the dignity of the Eucharistic Christ who travels with him or her to the sick or homebound. EMsHC should never make unnecessary detours when departing church and planning on making a pastoral visit. Rather, the EMHC should travel directly to the place of the visit. While the Blessed Sacrament is on one's person, silence in one's car is highly recommended.

A silver or precious pyx is to be used for the visit, which should be carried in a small pouch close to one's heart. It is also permissible to carry the pyx in one's breast pocket. Carrying the pyx in one's pocket should be scrupulously avoided out of respect for the Eucharistic Species.

Any hosts that remain following a visit should be brought back to the parish. If this is impossible, the hosts should be immediately consumed by the EMHC with reverence and devotion.

The pyx is to be purified and cleaned after visitations have concluded. This can be done by filling the pyx with water and consuming the water, or by pouring the water directly into the ground. The pyx should be dried with a purificator or air dried.

If the pyx is kept at a private home or is the EMHC's personal property, the pyx should be kept in a safe and secure place when not being used for visits.

The liturgical rite to be used by the EMHC when making pastoral visits is the "Rite of Distribution of Holy Communion in the Absence of a Priest." Only for exceptional cases should an abbreviated or alternative rite be used. Some period of silence should ideally follow the rite in order to allow the one being visited time to make a proper act of thanksgiving.

The EMHC should remind the one being visited of the need for regular confession, and should communicate to the pastor any concerns or health updates that would warrant an immediate visit by him.

Records and Installation

6. The parish should keep a record of who has been installed as EMsHC, and this list should be reviewed every three years. Pastors always have the right to terminate the service of an installed EMHC.

Pastors should ideally install EMsHC in the context of a Eucharistic Liturgy following the rite described in the Book of Blessings, though installation outside of Mass is by no means forbidden.

Documents to Review

General Instruction of the Roman Missal; Paragraphs 160, 161, 162

Redemptionis Sacramentum; Paragraphs 146-160

On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Ministry of the Priest; Practical Provisions Article 8

Rite of Distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass in the Absence of a Priest