

What is a Eucharistic Minister?

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What is a Eucharistic Minister?

Early History

Jesuit Father Joseph Jungmann's volume, *The Mass of the Roman rite*, has long been judged our most comprehensive and accurate history of the liturgy. In the text, he describes the various procedures for receiving Holy Communion. I would like to quote from his writings:

Up until the fourth century it was the rule, not merely an ideal that the faithful communicate at every Mass. Believers understood clearly that the action of all receiving the Lord's body and blood formed an integral and natural part of every Eucharistic celebration. Nevertheless, priests normally celebrated only on Sundays.

As a consequence, the faithful both communicated at that Sabbath Eucharist and also took a sufficient supply of sacred particles home with them for the week ahead.

This practice of lay persons-or, more specifically here, those not priests or deacons-keeping the sacred particles within the home thus made it likewise

possible for the sick, prisoners and isolated monks to communicate frequently, even daily despite the fact that weekday Mass was a rarity.

Historical research indicates that laypersons ordinarily received the Lord directly into their hands for the first nine centuries. Writings, pictures, and documentation speak of or illustrate this practice.

When many of us were children, you did not receive communion into your hands. The priest placed it directly on our tongue. This change came about during the 8-9th centuries. Many changes were taking place in the church. Many views came about concerning the Eucharist itself but also the role of the laity itself in the church. To quote Father Champlin,

“ In those medieval days, many Christians began to emphasize the divine aspects of the Eucharist and to stress the real, holy, tremendous, awesome presence of Christ our God in the sacrament. The host was, in a way, to be adored more than to be eaten. Our unworthiness in the face of this sublime gift led to less frequent reception of Communion, a greater distance between the altar and the pew, and more cautions surrounding the celebration of Mass.

Concurrently in those centuries the laity were gradually eliminated from the liturgy even from the “sacred places,” like the altar, which became reserved territories for clerics and in some cases for priests alone.”

For nearly a millennium the distance between the clergy and the laity existed. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, many European monasteries began to look at their liturgies and found that they were lacking. They began to investigate the histories of the church and the early practices. One such monastery was at Klosterneuberg in Austria. The pastor Father Pius Parsch sought to apply his new thinking and ancient research to parish life. Father Parsch’s work was the inspiration to other European parishes and his inspiration spread to America.

In 1903 Pope Pius X issued a decree on sacred music, which let the laity back into the liturgy officially. In 1943, Pope Pius the XII opened the crack a bit wider in his encyclical, “ the Mystical Body of Christ” which became the theological basis for many liturgical reforms. In 1947, the same pontiff in his encyclical letter *Mediator Dei* on “Sacred liturgy,” stated, “By the waters of baptism, as by common right, Christians are made members of the mystical body of Christ the Priest, and by the ‘character’ which is imprinted on their souls they are appointed to give worship to God, thus they participate according to their condition, in the priesthood of Christ.”

In 1963, these scattered principles being offered by the Vatican were tied together as a consequence of Vatican Reform as an integral part of Vatican II. The council Fathers brought out one more important statement regarding the role and function of the laity. “Mother Church earnestly desires that all faithful should be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ is their right and duty by reason of baptism.”

There was no explicit mention in the constitution of the Order of the Mass of special or lay ministers for the distribution of the Eucharist. However, as the number of communicants increased and the demands of parish life further increased, the need for such persons developed.

On January 29, 1973 Pope Paul VI issued an instruction *Immensae Caritatis* on “Facilitating Sacramental Communion in Particular circumstances.” In this document, the Holy Father said, “First of all, provision must be made lest reception of Communion become impossible or difficult because of insufficient ministers.” Several months later, the Holy See published a section of the Roman ritual entitled *Holy Communion and worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*. It reflected the development and approval of special or lay ministers for Holy Communion by providing rituals “if the minister is not a priest or a deacon.”

As Father Champlin states, “In some ways, you are not worthy to be or become a special, extraordinary, lay or religious minister of Holy Communion. No one is. Nor is any person worthy to serve as a deacon, priest, bishop or pope.” We are all sinners. “However.... as a Catholic lay person or religious who has received the sacraments of initiation—baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist—you do have the fundamental dignity, or worthiness to serve in that function. Lord I am not worthy---true, but, on the other hand, I have been selected by a careful process, accomplished presumably by prayer to the Holy spirit and appointed by a successor to the apostles.”

Questions for personal reflection:

- Why do I aspire to be a Eucharistic Minister?
- What do I need to know to be a good Minister?
- What attributes do I bring to this Ministry?

What are the qualities of a Eucharistic Minister?

I have listed four, which are most pertinent.

- Humility
- Hospitality
- Gratitude
- Reverence

Humility

As *Immensae Caritatis* notes, being a minister of communion is a “great office.” It is an honor, and one who has been chosen for the job should acknowledge that. But the honor should not cause the minister to have an exalted self-opinion. Jesus, the role model for all ministry, taught that ministry was about service. To make the point very clear, he put on an apron and washed the feet of his disciples. As you now, this washing of the feet is done in parishes during our Holy Week liturgy

As ministers of communion, we are usually willing to do whatever is asked of us. We try to serve whenever we are needed. As baptized members of the body of Christ, those to whom we minister the Eucharist also have Christ present within them. Can

we see, revere and accept Christ through them? Can we accept with joy and humility the many ways that Christ ministers to us, even while he ministers through us.

Hospitality

One of the most disturbing aspects of Jesus' ministry to the people of his time was his eagerness and willingness to share a meal with anyone at any time. In the Middle Eastern culture of Jesus' time, meals were regimented ways of acknowledging who was superior to whom. The structure of society was reflected, and in many ways maintained, by who ate with whom.

When we celebrate the Eucharist, we eat and drink at the table of the Lord in anticipation of the day when all will do the same. At the banquet of the Lord, all are equal. There is no head table. There is no children's table. There is no servant's table. The same is true of the Eucharist. All who gather are honored guests.

At the brief encounter that we have with each person to whom we minister at the liturgy, it may seem difficult to convey much to anyone. But a posture that is both attentive and relaxed, a warm smile, eye contact, an unhurried but efficient pace, a tone of voice that is reverent and cordial, all convey hospitality. These things can take time to develop, but will do so as the minister becomes more experienced. But from the beginning, every minister should approach the task with an attitude of hospitality.

Gratitude

The sacrament whose ministry is our special care is the Eucharist, which comes from the Greek word for "thanks." The ordinary way of saying thanks in modern Greek is *eucharistos*, just as it was in the time of Jesus.

The giving of thanks and praise in the Eucharist is the central and essential action of the church. Firstly, we give thanks for Jesus Christ, in whom all things were created and redeemed. Secondly, we give thanks for all of creation, for all that is good. In the liturgy, we constantly read and tell the stories of how God acted through and on behalf of humanity, especially through the Jewish people and through the Church. The gratitude that we express in the Eucharist is a basic element of each individual's life, too. Grateful person, share their gifts and blessings with others and receive gifts and blessings that others have to share. We must receive the great gift of the Lord's presence with grateful hearts and share that gift generously and joyfully with others, both in the ministry of communion and in our daily lives.

Reverence

As Catholics, we have been taught since our earliest days to treat the presence of the Lord in the Eucharist with the utmost reverence. As ministers of communion, we are teachers of reverence. How we act as we approach the altar, how we handle the sacred species of bread and wine, how we dress to perform our ministry not only express our own attitudes but also form the attitudes of others.

In our community, as in any group of human beings, there may be individuals we find difficult to deal with, people whose opinions are at odds with our own, and people who are different from us that we cannot begin to understand them. In one sense we have an unusual situation here at the chaplaincy. Not all, but most of us are from somewhere else. We are all from the Philippines, yet with a myriad of languages, histories, and cultures. We have not only learned to tolerate these differences, we have thrived in them and integrated them into a cohesive, loving caring family. We are all the same body of Christ and we owe all the same reverence that we owe Christ.

Nomenclature and Use of Mass Instruments



Chalice

The large cup used at Mass used to hold the wine, which becomes the Blood of Christ.



Paten

A saucer-like disk, which holds the bread, which becomes the Body of Christ.



Ciborium

A vessel used to hold the Hosts, which will be used for communion. They are also used to reserve the Blessed Sacrament in the tabernacle.



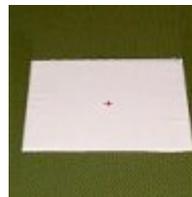
Corporal

A white linen cloth on which are placed the vessels containing the bread and wine during Mass which will become the Body and Blood of Christ.



Purificator

A white cloth use to cleanse the chalice. It resembles a napkin.



Pall

The stiff, square, white cover that is placed over the paten when it is on the chalice.



Chalice Veil

A small cloth which covers the chalice, paten and pall. The veil is the same liturgical color, material and design as the vestments of the priest



Pyx

Small container (Greek meaning 'box') that holds the consecrated Host taken to the sick

Liturgy

Before Mass- The Eucharistic Ministers should arrive a 15 to 20 minutes early. This is for two reasons. The first is to prepare themselves for their important role they will perform at the Mass. The second is to introduce himself or herself to the priest celebrating the Mass. This is especially important in our case as different priests celebrating our Mass. These priest will most likely ask you the procedure for Communion.

Entrance- the Eucharistic Ministers should process in with the others serving at the Mass. The Acolytes lead the way, followed by the Lector(s) for the Mass. The Eucharistic Minister(s) are after the Lectors. Walk reverentially and slowly. As discussed earlier, we have an obligation to lead the community in reverence by our display of reverence.

As we approach the altar, we stand to the either side in front of the altar to allow the celebrant space to approach the altar. After we have all bowed, we then may return to our seats.

Approaching the Altar for Communion Service- when either the choir sings the Lamb of God or it is spoken, proceed up to the altar. As we learned reverence is an important part of Liturgy. Make sure you always bow in the direction of the Precious Body and Blood. If in the tabernacle, bow in that direction or if on the altar in the direction of the altar.

If there is children's liturgy scheduled, please place the pyx on the altar. Wash your hands with the water on the small side table. As has become our custom now, we wear the stole while we give communion to the community.

Receiving Communion

Generally speaking, we receive communion under both species as Eucharistic Ministers. However, with Covid19, we are restricted to offer it under one species.

Distribution of Communion to the Faithful

Generally there are three Eucharistic Ministers at our First Sunday Masses. The three ministers, should stand in front of the altar to distribute communion. Generally, the priest celebrating the Mass will stand on the inner either side.

Many times, one group will finish distributing communion before others. Be ready to assist when there is an overflow situation. Flexibility is of most importance. The ushers will sometimes direct the faithful back to where you are standing if in the middle section of church. Be observant and find a suitable space to assist.

When you have finished distributing communion, please return the ciborium to the altar and stand off to the side of the altar. This is a good time to wash your hands again and prepare yourself to be of assistance to the celebrant as required.

Distribution of Communion to the Sunday School Teachers

One Eucharistic Minister is assigned the duty of giving Communion to the Sunday school teachers. The pyx has been placed on the altar at the beginning of the Eucharistic Service and should contain 3-5 hosts. There is generally one class only, which is held at the back room of the church. The Eucharistic Minister should give the children a "blessing" as we would the children attending the Mass when their parents. The Minister then gives Holy Communion to the Sunday school teachers. Again, if there are any hosts remaining, the best avenue is for the Eucharistic Minister to consume them. Please make sure that the pyx is also clean of small residual pieces of the Sacred Host.

Clearing the Altar

The priest essentially is responsible for cleaning the chalice and ciborium of the remaining wine and/or pieces of the Sacred Hosts. However, some priests sometimes do not clean the chalice, ciborium and/or paten. If that is the case, then the Eucharistic Minister must clean the Mass Instruments. If that were the case, then the procedure would be as follows:

- Remove all vessels from the altar and take them to the Sacristy
- Using a Purificator remove all bit of host from each ciborium into the chalice.
- Also clean the mass patens used by the acolytes in the same manner looking for small bits of host.
- Take water and pour into the chalice. Pour water into each chalice or ciborium that was used and consume the water from the last Mass Instrument. Dry each item using a Purificator.
- If you see any particles on the Purificator or altar, put on your finger and consume

Set Up For Next Mass

If there is another Mass immediately after the one you are serving, please set up the Mass Instruments for the next Mass. The order is as follows:

1. Chalice
2. Purificator
3. Paten
4. Large Host
5. Pall
6. Corporal
7. Chalice Veil

If there is no Mass, then replace all the items in their appropriate cupboard.

Recessional

As soon as all the items have been cleaned and set up for the next Mass or put away, the eucharistic Ministers should return to the altar. When the Acolytes collect the candles and the crucifix to leave the altar, the Eucharistic Ministers should proceed to the either side of the facing the altar. After the mass celebrant bows to the altar, we will process out of church in the same order we entered. Please proceed slowly and reverently down the aisle.

Other Important Information

1. Currently, Ria is setting up the Mass Instruments for the Masses. However, we should each know the procedure for setting them up if necessary. The order is as follows:
 - Chalice
 - Purificator
 - Paten
 - Large Host
 - Pall
 - Corporal
 - Chalice veil
2. I would suggest that whoever is responsible for taking the Holy Eucharist to the Sunday Scholl teachers, place the pyx on the small table beside the altar before Mass. You can then place it on the altar when you approach the altar before communion. We normally put between 3-5 hosts in the pyx. Remember that if this is not sufficient hosts, you may break one. If there are extra hosts after giving communion to the teachers, then you should consume the extras.
3. If a host should be dropped, immediately pick it up and consume it. Determine if there are any fragments of hosts and pick them up also.

