



St. Francis de Sales Parish

Holland, Michigan

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 11th century, when the custom of distributing the eucharist under the form of bread alone began to grow. By the 12th 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. During the Our Father, the minister for station #5 goes to the tabernacle to retrieve the ciborium, walking to the altar during the Lamb of God with the ciborium.
2. Come to the altar platform immediately after the sign of peace. Sanitize hands and then stand facing the altar.
3. If you have signed in as the 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.
4. If you have signed in as the chalice minister for station #1 or a chalice minister for station #2, please stand behind the altar on one of the *outer* two spots marked by tape.
5. 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 a host, then from the chalice. 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 station #1; the minister for station #5 goes to assigned station.
 - Immediately after they receive the host, the two ministers on the outer spots marked by tape (the minister of the chalice for station #1 and the minister of the chalice for station #2) 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 assigned stations.
 - *Note:* if an extraordinary minister of holy communion does not feel comfortable receiving from the chalice, you are not obligated to receive in this form.
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 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; extend a hand or use some other appropriate gesture to offer a very brief prayer of spiritual Communion, such as “May Christ be always in your heart” or “Receive Christ in your heart.” Refrain from making the Sign of the Cross over the person or using the word “bless” (such gestures are reserved for clergy).
 - **Communicants with a pyx:** Some communicants bring communion to those unable to come to church. After they have received holy communion, they have been instructed to wait at the altar with their pyx (the small container to hold the host) and the presider will give them the number of hosts they need.
 - **Communicants requiring low-gluten hosts:** Those who require low-gluten hosts will pick up a wooden cross from the Mass Coordinator before Mass begins and are asked to wear it / show it when approaching the communion minister. Low-gluten hosts are consecrated in a separate pyx (there could be multiple at a given Mass). If a communicant approaches you indicating the need for a low-gluten host, you will find the pyx with the low-gluten host on the altar, or sometimes on the low table next to the presider.
 - **Communicants who are unable to walk forward to receive:** Make sure all who want to receive have done so. You may need to bring the hosts and chalice to people who are unable to walk to the front of Church. The ushers will let you know if this is needed.
10. When the chalice is empty or all have received, take the chalice to the credence table (the table to the side of the altar, covered in white). If precious blood remains in the chalice after all have received, ministers of the chalice should NOT “self-communicate” – that is, they should not simply consume remaining Precious Blood in their own chalice. Instead, ministers should offer the remaining Precious Blood to other appropriate and willing ministers near the credence table OR or leave it on the corporal on the credence table for the presider or deacon to consume. Leave empty chalices with purificators draped over them on the credence table. Return to your place in church.
11. If your paten (bowl) runs out and more communicants remain, you may approach the altar and retrieve more hosts yourself (do so *reverently*) from the ciborium on the altar. 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, 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 altar server that you need another purificator or get another purificator from the cupboard underneath the credence table (the one covered in white).

Special instructions for the Minister of Station #5

1. As is outlined above, during the Our Father, the minister for station #5 goes to the tabernacle to retrieve the ciborium, walking to the altar during the Lamb of God with the ciborium.
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 give the ciborium to the presider.
3. From there, the minister of station #5 sanitizes hands and then stands on one of the two *inner* spots marked with tape, and steps forward after the priest receives the consecrated bread and wine. You receive a host and from the chalice from the priest; then the priest will hand you a Paten (bowl), and you will distribute hosts to other ministers. When all the ministers have received, you go to your assigned station.
4. When all the congregation has received, ministers return their patens (bowls) to the altar. Wait as the priest places 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.