

St Joan of Arc Parish Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC) in Ministry to Sick and Homebound

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Cor 10:17)



Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'
(Matthew 25: 37-40)

Commission: To care for the faithful who are ill or infirm and through illness or infirmity unable to take their accustomed place in the Eucharistic community. In bringing communion to them, the Extra Ordinary Minister of Communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at the Eucharist. For the sick the reception of communion is not only a privilege but also a sign of support and concern shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill.

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs)

1. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) who take Communion to the sick and homebound have a role in sharing the Church's total ministry to the sick after the manner of Jesus. They must be trained and then commissioned by the Parish Priest as Extraordinary Ministers of Communion in order to perform this important ministry. (paraphrased from "On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry Of Priest" paragraph 4, article 8 and 9, and the Code of Canon Law 935)
2. The EMHC should not be called by any other name than, "Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion". This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known and not called a "special minister of Holy Communion" nor "extraordinary minister of

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the Eucharist” nor “special minister of the Eucharist”. (Redemptionis Sacramentum 156) This will avoid any confusion as to your ministry.

3. In bringing Communion to the sick and home bound, the EMHC represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at Sunday Mass. This ministry is a sign of support and concern shown by the community for its members’.
4. Patients who are in the hospital find it a comfort and source of healing to have Holy Communion brought to them as often as possible. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may make Communion visits any day of the week in accordance with the schedule and the protocol of each hospital or long-term residential facility.
5. The EMHC becomes a vital link between the parish community and the member who is sick or homebound. EMHCs do not replace the ministry of the priest to the people, but rather extend and expand it so that all will have more regular contact with Christ in Holy Communion. It is beneficial for visits to the sick and homebound to occur after Sunday Mass so that the link between the parish liturgical celebration and the parishioner is maintained. Also little things like taking a parish bulletin helps maintain that link. Normally, as part of the Mass, EMHCs will receive the consecrated Host from the Parish Priest or Deacon, a special blessing, and dismissal after Communion. The assembly is sending them forth to perform their ministry on the behalf of the whole parish community
6. EMHCs who minister to the sick and homebound should be empathic and compassionate. They should be sensitive to the sick and homebound person’s needs including the spiritual, emotional, and material. They should always take care to maintain the confidentiality and dignity of the individual. **They should also maintain contact with the pastor and/or parish pastoral care coordinator and inform them if the person is in need of sacramental anointing, the sacrament of reconciliation, or a pastoral visit.** In addition, if EMHCs observe a particular physical or social need of a homebound person, they should bring this need to the attention of the pastoral care coordinator as well so that the parish may respond appropriately.
7. The Eucharist for Communion outside of church is to be carried in a Pyx and the dress of the EMHC and the manner of carrying the Eucharist should be appropriate to the task at hand. If you use a Parish Pyx, please sign it out prior to mass or removing it from the sacristy and please return it to the sacristy as soon as possible following the visit to the sick. The Pyx notebook can be found in the



Figure 1 Picture of Pyx

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sacristy. Before a Pyx is used, it is to be blessed by a Priest (Redemptionis Sacramentum 118). Remember the Pyx is a sacred vessel and it too should be treated and stored with the utmost respect.

8. When carrying the Blessed Sacrament, be careful to place it in a safe spot. You may place the pyx in a small cloth bag and wear it around your neck or you may put it in your pocket, or handbag. If you need to do that, you should be careful to place it alone, rather than in a cluttered place. **Do not leave it unattended.** You should go directly after Mass to the person(s) to whom you will be bringing communion and not let other things distract you from your ministry, e.g., go shopping or visiting. (paraphrased from Redemptionis Sacramentum 133) You do want to remember that you are carrying the Blessed Sacrament and attending to the work of God so if you meet someone, you do want to smile and greet your neighbors or friends, but you want to be careful about stopping and engaging in an unnecessary conversation. Use your common sense!



9. The pyx should be kept in a safe and respectful place when not in use. Take the pyx to the community's celebration of Eucharist on the day of visiting the sick. When a minister no longer needs the pyx, it is returned to the sacristy.

10. If the sick or homebound person is well enough to participate in the full ritual, "Communion Under Ordinary Circumstances", use that ritual. If the person is not very well, use the shorter ritual "Communion in a Hospital or Institution". Both of these rituals are found in on page 8 of this document. The smaller booklet "Blue Booklet" Communion of the Sick available in the sacristy (**please return** your copy when you complete your visit) also provides some good ideas.



Figure 3: Blue Rite Booklet

11. EMHCs serving in hospitals or institutions should always be sure that they are giving Holy Communion to the correct person. If there are Catholic family members or Catholic staff present, the EMHC should ask them if they would like to receive Holy Communion as well. When EMHCs have completed their assigned distribution, they should return any extra hosts to the Tabernacle. In **extraordinary** circumstances they may consume the hosts privately.
12. Extraordinary Ministers of Communion who are taking Holy Communion to the sick, homebound or to those in hospitals are to present the host in a prayerful manner. They are not to make judgments regarding the suitability of the person to receive the Holy

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Communion; such concerns are to be referred through the pastoral care coordinator to the pastor or deacon.

13. Ordinarily, the parish pastoral care coordinator makes assignments and communicates assignments to the EMHCs and the sick and homebound.

Planning the Visit:

- Make an appointment to visit a sick parishioner in his/her home. Never come unannounced even if regular visits to the same home are scheduled. Ask at this time how well the sick person is doing. You need to determine if the sick person can consume the host. If they cannot consume and still desire a visit, please still conduct a visit and pray with the sick for healing bringing with you the prayers and wishes of the community. Ask who else may be present when you come so you can plan on enlisting their help or because they too may wish to take part in the Communion.
- If possible, plan to attend the Mass closest to the time in which you plan to visit the sick. It is best to take Holy Communion directly from the community's celebration of Eucharist in the church to the person in the home. If this is not reasonable, and no substitute is available, please bring Communion as soon as possible.
- Remember to bring your Pyx to Mass or sign one out from the Sacristy before Mass.
- If you cannot attend the Mass, coordinate with the Parish staff (757)898-5570 or the Coordinators for the Ministry to the Sick and the Homebound to obtain access to the Reserve Sacrament.
- Bring a Missal or Bible marked with the Sunday readings if you choose to use them rather than readings from the Rite Book. Read through the Rite and the readings to ensure you are familiar with them. If coming from Mass, you may want to try to remember or even jot down a few notes from the Homily to share with the person being visited.
- Make sure you have any needed items (if practical) to prepare a worship space. A cloth to place the pyx on, a cross or crucifix (if the family has one or you have brought one), perhaps a candle as well and the pyx with the host in it.
- Spend time at Mass or before the Tabernacle praying for the healing of the individual to be visited and for any other intentions. Pray for the grace to be Christ for the sick person being visited.
- Know the name of the individual to be visited, their address or room number, and maybe even the telephone number for the visit. If need be, map out the route. Bring them with you.

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- Have a plan to return the Sacrament to the Tabernacle if the host is not consumed or dispose of the Sacrament in the manner indicated below if not fully consumed.
- Be relaxed.

During the Visit:

- If at a Hospital, check in with the nurse at the desk so they are aware of your visit and ask if the person is able to receive communion. Also ask for a cup of water to assist in the reception of the Host if water is not already available in the room.
- Introduce yourself to those present (usually family, caregivers, or friends), explaining briefly, if necessary, that you represent the parish and what you have come to do.
- If the communicant can carry on a conversation with ease, begin informally by asking how he or she is feeling today. Pay close attention to the reply. (This should be a brief exchange, since you are visiting for a specific purpose.)
- Use your judgment in these first few moments to ascertain whether to enlist those present in planning and carrying out the celebration—as lectors, for example.
- Invite friends and family to join the celebration as a praying community. Determine who else may be taking part in communion. All Catholics who are participating may be invited to receive Communion.
- Determine, on the basis of the person’s strength, whether to share a brief recollection from the parish homily after the Scripture reading.
- When everyone is ready, prepare a worship space (if practical) by laying out a cloth (on which to place the Pyx), a cross or crucifix (if the family has one or you have brought one), and the Pyx with the host in it.
- Allow a moment of silent recollection.
- Follow the ritual: Communion for the Sick. Begin formally with the prescribed greeting. Make the sign of the cross on yourself, and if the person you are visiting is unable to do so, make a sign of the cross on his or her forehead.
- Remember that you are representing the parish and are bringing “the community gathered to celebrate Christ’s presence” to a member who is physically unable to assemble with the congregation.
- Create links to the parish assembly as much as possible. Bring a parish bulletin, give parish news and concerns. Find out other needs and desires of the person you visit and bring them back to the parish.
- Offer a cup of water following reception of Communion, especially if the person you are visiting cannot swallow the host easily.
- Thank the person you are visiting for this experience of worship and hospitality.

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After the Visit:

- Return the Sacrament to the Tabernacle if the host is not consumed or dispose of the Sacrament if not fully consumed. For example:
 - **What if the sick person is unable to swallow the entire host?** Water may be offered to the sick person receiving Communion to aid in swallowing the host. If warranted, just a small portion of the host can be offered if the person is too ill to receive the entire host. The remaining portion of that host must be consumed by someone who is participating in the prayer or by you as minister of Communion. Remember that the divine presence in the Blessed Sacrament is the same regardless of the size of the portion of the host. Consult with the family concerning the condition of the person regarding swallowing.
 - **What should I do if the host is dropped or the person removes it from his/her mouth?** If the host is dropped and there are no health concerns, the host may be picked up and consumed. If the dropped host presents health concerns or the person removes the host from his/her mouth, it should be dissolved in water and the water poured into the church sacrarium (the drain in the sacristy sink). Of course, if anyone declines or refuses to receive Communion, you would respect this wish.
- Spend some time before the Tabernacle in prayer thanking God for the opportunity to serve him.
- Return a Parish Pyx to the Sacristy and sign it back into the Pyx Sign-Out Book.
- Inform the Parish Staff or the Ministry Coordinators any special requests (e.g. Anointing of the Sick, Reconciliation) as soon as possible. It is important to follow-up. You are the link back to the community for any of these requests.

Some Don'ts of Bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound

- Don't visit a sick person if you are not feeling well yourself. Find a substitute.
- Don't stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
- Don't compete with a television or radio. Politely ask if these can be turned off during the service.
- Don't carry the consecrated host in a plastic bag, purse, pocket or other unsuitable container. Instead, use a pyx to carry the consecrated host
- Stay too long

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- Don't leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later time to see the sick person. "It is never allowed for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone else to administer [Communion], as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick person who is the communicant." (Redemptionis Sacramentum 159) Consume any consecrated host or return it to tabernacle in the church. Don't take hosts home or leave them in your car.
- Take on the role of counselor or confidant. Your role as a Minister of Holy Communion need not include either of these. Refer the sick person to the parish staff if counseling is sought.
- Promise to return during the week if you think you will not be able to keep your promise.
- Be afraid to make mistakes. Everyone does. Try to learn from yours.

Some Common questions:

- **If taking Holy Communion is only part of my visit with the sick or homebound person, should prayer and communion be at the beginning or end of our time together?** There is no set rule but most people find it more comfortable to spend some time in conversation before sharing prayer and Holy Communion. The conversation could include ideas from the homily and reassurance that the parish community prayerfully supports that person. If the sick or homebound person prefers time for private devotion, it is suggested that you visit before prayer and indicate that you will leave immediately after distribution of Communion so as to allow time for quiet reflection and devotion. This respects the privacy of the person while also honoring the importance of communal prayer as part of Eucharist.
- **Are the sick or homebound required to fast an hour before receiving communion?** No, they may receive Communion at any hour and need not adhere to the normal fasting regulations. (Code of Canon Law 919 §3).

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to Sick and Homebound**

Communion in a Hospital or Institution

I. GREETING

All: In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Minister: Let us pray.

II. PENITENTIAL RITE

Minister: My brothers and sisters, to prepare ourselves for this celebration, let us call to mind our sins.

All: I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin, all the Angels and Saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God.

During the Confiteor, the faithful should "strike their breast" while saying, "through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault." This prescribed "striking" is a symbolic tapping of the chest with a clenched fist over one's heart, signifying remorse.

Minister: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen.

II. READING OF THE WORD: Minister will recite the day's reading(s) and Gospel

III. COMMUNION

Minister: At the Savior's command and formed by divine teaching, we dare to say:

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Minister : Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

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All: Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Minister distributes the host.

IV. CONCLUSION

Minister: Let us pray. (Minister recites prayer after communion and other prayer(s) for health and healing at his/her option)

All: Amen

Minister: (Making the Sign of the Cross) May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

All: Amen

References

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