



Lay Communion Ministers

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Archdiocese of Brisbane 1982, revised 1993, 2012

1. To use extraordinary ministers of holy communion, there must be a genuine need because sufficient ordinary ministers are not available.

(a) Within a Mass

A genuine need exists at Mass when the time taken for the distribution of communion begins to unbalance the parts of the liturgy. The time of thanksgiving, for example, should not be compromised. (*General Instruction, 121*)

A variety of circumstances could give rise to this genuine need for lay communion ministers. These could include:

- a large congregation who wish to receive communion,
- the absence or illness of an ordinary minister,
- communion given in the form both of bread and of wine.

These circumstances might be temporary or of a more permanent nature.

An ordinary minister, however, should not be regarded as being available for the distribution of communion when he is not available to be present at the whole celebration of the Eucharist.

(b) Outside a Mass

A genuine need exists outside of Mass, when the ordinary ministers are unable to give the sick and the aged "every opportunity to

receive the Eucharist frequently, and even daily during the Easter season". (*Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum, 72*)

Lay communion ministers make it possible to bring communion to the sick more frequently, and thus free the priest for his other responsibilities to the sick: visiting them, celebrating reconciliation with them, giving them the anointing of the sick.

A genuine need may also exist when a priest is not available to preside over the worshipping community. In these circumstances, and with pastoral collaboration between priest and people, an extraordinary minister might preside over a service which may include a communion rite.

2. The bishop, as chief pastor of the diocese, is responsible for choosing and designating lay people as ministers of communion.

The priest, in conjunction with members of the parish community, should develop a list of persons suitable to be communion ministers. It should include women and men, lay and religious.

The list of names should be submitted to the Archbishop in writing.

The Archbishop's approval for a person to act as a minister of holy communion applies only in the parish or community from which the request was made.

Their designation is valid for a limited time only, the length of which is to be determined by the priest.

There is no restriction on the number of people who may be nominated for a particular parish. Sufficient ministers to meet the needs of the parish should be nominated. They should be people whose lives conform to the meaning of their service, so that their appointment will cause no scandal.

3. Prior to their designation to this ministry, the ministers should be adequately prepared. This preparation should be spiritual and liturgical as well as practical. On completion of this preparation there is to be a public rite of designation celebrated in the community where the ministers of communion will function.

Normally the rite of designation in a parish would take place at a Sunday Mass.

4. In unforeseen circumstances, where there is genuine need, a priest may designate 'ad hoc' ministers for a particular occasion.

(a) Within a Mass

The priest should approach suitable persons before Mass begins, ensure that they understand what they are doing, and how to do it, and he should use the short rite of commissioning ministers for a single occasion. This short rite is given in the *Roman Missal* (p. 1511). It is not used for regular communion ministers.

(b) Outside a Mass

Illness in a family where a rich eucharistic faith is known to exist, for example, could be the occasion for the 'ad hoc' designation of a family member to bring the Eucharist home to the sick person (cf. 1(b) above).

5. Care should be taken to enable the ministers to function with dignity.

These suggestions may help parishes (pastors, liturgy planning teams, communion ministers,

etc) to make the required practical arrangements for lay communion ministers.

(a) Within a Mass

- Ministers should be suitably dressed.
- They should normally not perform other ministries at that Mass (reader, cantor, usher, collector, etc.).
- They sit in the assembly; some parishes like to include the ministers in their entrance procession.
- The communion ministers may come to the sanctuary after the sign of peace.
- They approach the altar to receive communion after the priest has received communion himself. He gives the lay ministers the communion vessels and they take the Eucharist to the people according to the local custom.

(b) Outside a Mass

Though communion ministers may bring communion to the sick at any time the sign value is enhanced when the Eucharist is carried directly from Mass to the sick person. The communion is thus clearly related to the community table.

(i) Thus, at communion time, the presider may prepare the pyxes at the altar, and then, after the Prayer after Communion, 'send out' the lay ministers as community representatives.

(ii) Alternatively, the ministers may remain till the end of Mass, talk with other members of the community, and then take the prepared pyxes from the tabernacle to the sick.

(iii) However, apart from a Mass, the lay minister may go to the tabernacle, place the required number of hosts into the pyx and leave the church.

The way the pyx is carried and where it is placed should respect the dignity of the sacrament. On their way to the sick person, ministers should avoid long or unnecessary

distractions. Other members of the community may go with the minister.

On arrival at the home, the minister greets the family and the sick person in a friendly manner and places the pyx on a table or at the bedside. The prayer begins, using the rite in *Communion of the Sick*, published by Liturgy Brisbane. What remains of the consecrated bread afterwards may be consumed or returned to the tabernacle.