

Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

Description

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) — sometimes referred to simply as “ministers” in these guidelines — are properly formed, instructed, and commissioned lay persons. They are appointed to help in the distribution of Holy Communion at Mass and/or to the sick and homebound.

Initial Steps

- ✦ Qualifications: The person must be a faith-filled man or woman who leads a good Christian life and who's at least 16 years of age and has been confirmed.
- ✦ Appointment: With the above conditions met, and after consulting the parish council, the pastor appoints the person as an EMHC.
- ✦ Commissioning: After the preparation for this ministry is completed, the EMHC is commissioned at a weekend Mass.

Length of Service

The appointment as an EMHC is for an indefinite period of time. At times, one may go through a period of uncertainty as to one's relationship with the Church. If that occurs, it may be best to take some time off from this ministry.

Reverence and Dress

EMHCs are to show the utmost reverence for the Eucharist. This reverence is reflected in their demeanor at Mass, their dress, and the manner in which they handle the Holy Eucharist and the Sacred Vessels.

A neat and reverential appearance is in keeping with the minister's role and belief in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The minister's dress should be appropriate and shouldn't detract from that role.

Specifically, the following guidelines are to be observed:

Men should wear dress slacks, shirts with collars, and dress shoes.

Women should wear a blouse with pants or a skirt, or a dress which covers the shoulders and is of appropriate length, and dress shoes.

Shorts, tee-shirts, low-cut pants, jeans, strapless tops, sleeveless shirts, sports shoes, jogging clothes, flip-flops, etc. are not acceptable dress.

EMHCs should refrain from using strong cologne, perfume, or aftershave because some recipients of Communion have sensitivities to these scents.

Inability to Serve

If an EMHC is unable to serve at an assigned Mass, he or she should attempt to find a replacement. If that proves impossible, the EMHC should call the rectory and leave a message that no one will be there to serve at that Mass.

Last-Minute Substituting

There may be times when an EMHC may want to volunteer if the assigned minister isn't present. However, if the EMHC isn't properly dressed, it may be appropriate for him or her not to volunteer. The appropriateness of dress in such a situation is at the discretion of the pastor.

Before Mass

- ✦ The EMHC should arrive at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.
- ✦ The minister takes a cross from the pulpit and puts it on.
- ✦ The minister should sit in one of the front pews.
- ✦ The minister shouldn't perform any other ministry during the same Mass, unless it's unavoidable.

Procedures before the Distribution of Communion

- ♦ When the recitation of the Our Father concludes, the EMHC proceeds to a position in front of the bottom sanctuary step.
- ♦ After the Sign of Peace, the minister bows to the altar, moves to the right of the altar, rinses his or her hands (ministers of the cup need not rinse their hands), and waits at the bottom step. Ministers of the Cup each take a purificator from the altar.
- ♦ After the priest has received from the Chalice, the minister moves up onto the second step and receives Communion from the priest.
- ♦ The minister bows his or her head before saying “Amen” when receiving both the Body of Christ and the Precious Blood.
- ♦ After the minister receives Communion, he or she is given the Ciborium or the Cup by the priest. All ministers then proceed to their positions.

Procedures during the Distribution of Communion

- ♦ The priest and/or EMHC distributes Communion first to any handicapped persons who may be in the front pews.
- ♦ The minister and the priest begin distributing Communion at the same time.
- ♦ In ministering the Host: The minister holds the host slightly above the Ciborium, looks at the communicant, and in a clear voice says “The Body of Christ,” to which the communicant responds “Amen.” The minister then places the Host in the hand or on the tongue of the communicant.
- ♦ In ministering the Cup: The minister holds the Cup slightly forward, looks at the communicant and in a clear voice says “The Blood of Christ,” to which the communicant responds “Amen.” The minister then hands the Cup to the communicant. After the Cup is handed back, the minister, using the purificator, wipes the Cup where the communicant’s lips touched it. The minister then rotates the Cup one-quarter turn.
- ♦ In the case of non-communicants, the minister could say something like “May God be with you.” Words or gestures of blessing are to be avoided.

Accidents during the Distribution of Communion

- ♦ If a Host falls, the EMHC should immediately pick it up and put it in his or her hand holding the Ciborium. After Communion, the minister should bring the soiled Host to the altar and place it in the ablution cup next to the tabernacle.
- ♦ If the Precious Blood spills, the minister should immediately place the purificator over the spill and obtain a fresh purificator from the altar. The priest will take care of the spill after Mass.
- ♦ In either of these situations, the minister shouldn’t panic and should try not to embarrass the communicant.

Procedures after the Distribution of Communion

- ♦ When the line of communicants for a minister ends: 1) the minister of the Host returns to the altar; 2) the minister of the Cup takes one step back and waits until all have received Communion and then returns to the altar.
- ♦ After the distribution of Communion, the EMHC returns the Ciborium or Cup to the altar and hands it directly to the priest. Ministers of the Cup return their the purificator back to the altar.
- ♦ The minister remains to the right of the altar until the priest closes the tabernacle door. The minister then proceeds to a position in front of the bottom sanctuary step, bows, and returns to his or her seat.
- ♦ After Mass, the minister returns his or her cross to the pulpit.