

**Supplemental Guidelines for Extraordinary  
Ministers of Holy Communion and the  
Distribution of Holy Communion Outside Mass**

**Diocese of Colorado Springs**



**Approved June 4, 2021**





## Diocese of Colorado Springs

Office of the Bishop  
228 North Cascade Avenue  
Colorado Springs, Colorado 80903

Telephone (719) 636-2345 • FAX (719) 866-6488

June 4, 2021

Dear Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC),

I sincerely appreciate your willingness to participate in the ministry and care for those unable to attend Mass at their parish. This is an important and laudable ministry.

Some Catholics are not able to attend a Mass because they are confined to their residence, hospitalized, or incarcerated. This situation may be either short or long term. While there is an annual obligation to receive Holy Eucharist, pastors should see to it that the sick and aged, even those not seriously ill or in danger of death, are given every opportunity to receive the Eucharist frequently. If one is near death, the reception of Viaticum is encouraged; daily if possible.

The responsibility for meeting the sacramental and spiritual needs of those not able to attend Mass belongs to the pastor of the parish where the residence, hospital, care facility, or detention facility is located. Only a priest can offer Mass, anoint the sick and offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Furthermore, the preference is that an ordinary minister of Holy Communion (i.e. a priest or deacon) bring the blessed sacrament to the sick. However, when that is not feasible, a mandated Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may perform this ministry.

The diocese supports this parish ministry by establishing guidelines and offering to coordinate the staffing of both ordinary ministers and EMHC across canonical boundaries, when requested by a pastor. This is most helpful in prisons, jails, and larger care facilities.

Your ministry is truly valued as it serves both the spiritual and sacramental needs of those not able to visit a parish. Thank you for your participation.

Most Reverend Michael J. Sheridan  
Apostolic Administrator, Diocese of Colorado Springs



## **Supplemental Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion and the Distribution of Holy Communion Outside Mass**

These guidelines are designed to assist and encourage pastors and ministry personnel to develop their pastoral care of the homebound, hospitalized, residents of care facilities and incarcerated within their communities of faith and to offer clear guidance to Catholics involved in this pastoral care mission. To serve as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a privilege, and it is a ministry to which someone is called. Not only do EMHC perform a service to their community by assisting at Mass but they may also participate in the Church's ministry of healing and caring when they bring Holy Communion to those who are not able to attend Mass. This is a sacred opportunity to bring Christ in the Eucharist to those in our community who have been separated from us, and to be Christ for these brothers and sisters while extending the compassionate care of the Church through our own hands and hearts.

The situations and environments are many and varied when bringing Holy Communion to those who are unable to attend Mass at a parish. But the one constant is the abiding presence of Christ in the Eucharist. These guidelines have been prepared specifically for those EMHC who bring the Eucharist to those who are homebound, hospitalized, residents of care facilities or incarcerated. They are intended to serve as an aid and a reference to assist these ministers in performing their roles in a prayerful, reverent, and consistent manner.

These guidelines assume that laity serving in this ministry have received basic formation, training at their parish, and have been mandated by the bishop to serve as an EMHC. Questions about any aspect of serving as an EMHC should be directed to your pastor.

### **THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION**

The Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion is a bishop, priest, or deacon (*CIC* 910, §1). However, "when the needs of the Church require it, and when ordinary ministers are lacking" (*CIC* 230, §3, *CIC* 910, §2), other members of the faithful, known as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, may be commissioned to assist with the distribution of the Sacrament. Within Mass, the EMHC may distribute Holy Communion when there are insufficient ordained ministers capable of administering the Sacrament, to provide a timely and reverent distribution of Holy Communion. Outside Mass, the EMHC may also assist parish priests and deacons in the distribution of Holy Communion to the homebound, hospitalized, residents of care facilities and incarcerated.

#### **The Minister Him/Herself**

More than simply a functionary, EMHC should express in their lives a sincere striving after the truth and holiness that characterizes the Church of God. Hence, EMHC must be persons of good moral character with a full and manifest commitment to all those teachings and disciplines that the Church presents for our assent of faith. In a very special way EMHC must hold to the truth of the real and substantial presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Holy

Eucharist. At the very least, EMHC must never deny or speak against any teaching of the Catholic Church.

More specifically:

1. EMHC must be at least 16 years of age and have received all the Sacraments of Initiation.
2. EMHC must be faithful and practicing Catholics, with nothing permanently impeding them from receiving Holy Communion themselves (e.g., a canonically irregular marital union).
3. EMHC should manifest a love and reverence for and devotion to the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.
4. EMHC should receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly and should never exercise their ministry if in the state of mortal sin.
5. EMHC are to make themselves regularly available to perform this ministry.
6. EMHC must be mandated by the bishop or his delegate.
7. EMHC must be well-trained and be familiar with the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum* as these relate to their specific ministry.
8. EMHC should make every effort to use proper terminology when speaking of their ministry or of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. Words are instructive. Incorrect words instruct incorrectly. For example, the still-common term “Eucharistic Minister” has been reprobated. This is a ministry of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. Only bishops and priests are Eucharistic Ministers. In addition to bishops and priests, deacons are also Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

The consecrated elements are to be identified as “**the Body of Christ**” and “**the Blood of Christ**” or “**the Precious Blood**.”

### **Communion Outside Mass**

To support the pastor’s responsibility of meeting the pastoral and sacramental needs of those unable to attend Mass, the pastor may appoint duly mandated EMHC to assist him and the parish deacons in distributing Holy Communion to those in homes, hospitals, care facilities, prisons, and jails. The pastor must approve these EMHC for this ministry and ensure each is adequately trained for distributing Holy Communion outside Mass. Note, that each EMHC is mandated to serve only in the parish for which he or she is mandated. If the need arises for an EMHC to serve outside his or her parish, permission must be obtained from both the pastor of the EMHC’s parish and the pastor of the parish in which the EMHC is being called to serve.

### **PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION OUTSIDE MASS**

Prior to distributing Holy Communion outside Mass, the EMHC should prepare for making visits. This includes determining the days and times for visits and the number of

Consecrated Hosts that will be required, assembling the materials needed for the visit(s), dressing appropriately for the visit, and preparing through prayer.

1. The EMHC should determine the days and times that will meet the needs of those they will be visiting, considering that the most appropriate time is immediately after Mass, especially on Sundays.
  - a. For individuals in homes, the EMHC should contact each homebound to establish a day and time for the visit.
  - b. For care facilities, the EMHC should consult with the pastor or deacon who coordinates visits to care facilities to establish the day and time for visits.
  - c. For prisons and jails, the EMHC should consult with the Director of Prison Ministry or those deacons assigned to the prison ministry.
2. EMHC should communicate to the pastor, or a delegated pastoral staff member, the approximate number of Consecrated Hosts needed. An excessive and unnecessary number of Consecrated Hosts is to be avoided. On the other hand, the EMHC should avoid bringing an insufficient number to avoid having to fracture the Consecrated Hosts.
3. The EMHC should assemble a “kit” for distributing Holy Communion outside Mass. The kit should consist of the following:
  - a. A pyx that has been blessed by a priest or a deacon and that is of sufficient size for the number of Consecrated Hosts required. ***The pyx is to be placed in a burse and worn around the neck per diocesan norms.***
  - b. A small corporal or purificator on which to place the pyx during the Communion rite. This is recommended even when the communicant or facility provides a linen cloth.
  - c. A small crucifix, for those situations in which the communicant or facility does not provide one.
  - d. A candle that may be lighted during the Communion rite if this does not pose any danger or risk (e.g., use of an oxygen tank, allergies).
  - e. A rite book that contains the prescribed rituals of the Communion of the Sick, either Communion in Ordinary Circumstances and Communion in a Hospital or Institution. Our diocese prescribes the following, which should be provided by the parish:
    - *Communion of the Sick*, Liturgical Press (English)
    - *Communion of the Sick*, Catholic Book Publishing Co. (English & Spanish)
  - f. A bible as a source of additional Scripture readings and for prayer.
4. The EMHC should wear attire appropriate to this ministry (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* no. 72). Business casual dress is recommended.
5. The EMHC must always be mindful of his/her public persona as a representative of the parish and of the Catholic Church.

## **Reception of Consecrated Hosts**

EMHC will receive the Consecrated Hosts from a parish, and each parish may establish its own procedures for providing the Consecrated Hosts to the EMHC who will distribute Holy Communion outside Mass. The procedure may vary depending on whether it is a weekday or Sunday. In any case, this procedure should reflect the following principles:

1. The preferred approach, especially on Sundays, is to have the hosts taken to the recipient(s) as soon as possible after being consecrated at Mass with the community. As a visible sign of the connection of our absent members to the Eucharistic celebration, at the *option of the pastor*, the EMHC is dismissed from Mass as a public witness to bring the healing presence of Christ and the community to those not able to attend Mass.
2. If the previous approach is not available, EMHC may receive the Consecrated Hosts from the parish tabernacle according to the procedures of the parish. To safeguard the Blessed Sacrament, the pastor is obligated to restrict access to the tabernacle. Therefore, an EMHC should notify the pastor in advance and coordinate a time for a priest or deacon to open the tabernacle for this purpose.
3. EMHC must receive the Consecrated Hosts in a proper pyx that is to be placed in a burse (carrying case) and kept on the EMHC's person. No other container, bag, purificator, or cloth are to be used.
4. The EMHC should go directly from church to the communicant(s) without stops. It is not appropriate to stop at home or anywhere else after receiving the Consecrated Hosts. When traveling please be reverent and avoid non-sacred activities such as listening to the radio or non-emergency phone conversations. Consider reciting the rosary, divine mercy chaplet, or quietly enjoy the presence of Christ.

## **VISITATION GUIDELINES**

EMHC may be called upon to distribute Holy Communion to individuals in homes, hospitals, care facilities, prisons, or jails. The following guidelines apply to all circumstances.

### **Who Can Receive?**

When distributing Holy Communion outside Mass, each communicant should be asked if he/she is Catholic and properly disposed to receive Holy Communion.

1. Holy Communion may not be offered or given to a person who is not a baptized member of the Catholic Church. The EMHC must determine that a person is a Catholic before giving him/her Holy Communion (*CIC* 912).
2. Holy Communion should not be given to anyone in a canonically irregular marital union. If this is suspected, please consult with your pastor.
3. Anyone who desires to receive Christ in the Eucharist must be in the state of grace. Anyone aware of having sinned mortally must not receive communion without having received absolution in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (*CIC* 916 and *CCC* 1415). Any

person who declines Holy Communion because he/she wants first to go to confession, should never be told that confession is not necessary.

4. A person who has already received the Most Holy Eucharist cannot receive it again on the same day outside Mass except in the case of Viaticum (*CIC* 917, *CIC* 921 §2)
5. The elderly, the infirm, and those who care for them can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have eaten something within the preceding hour (*CIC* 919 §3).
6. Regarding certain conditions and the state of a communicant:
  - a. The communicant must be conscious, prepared, well enough, and willing to receive Holy Communion at the time of its reception.
  - b. Use good judgment when a person has a mental illness or is under heavy medication and does not appear to understand. If there is some acknowledgement from the person about what is happening and they want to receive, err on the side of giving them Communion but ensure that they consume the Host before you leave them.
  - c. If a person does not speak English, seek a nurse or aide to see if there is someone who may be able to translate for you. If there is not, you can attempt to communicate with the person by showing him/her the Host. If he/she still does not understand, it is best to pray quietly for him/her and leave.
  - d. The distribution of Holy Communion to isolated patients with highly communicable diseases must follow the proper protocol of the institutions. For these special cases, EMHC must receive proper training by the host institution.
7. Family members and/or friends of the communicant who are present during the service may request to receive Holy Communion. ***However, they are to be reminded that this is not a substitute for attending Mass.*** If the EMHC has enough Consecrated Hosts, Catholics who are properly disposed, as prescribed in items 1 – 5 above, may receive.
8. If an EMHC encounters an unusual situation, he/she should consult with the pastor, especially when there is doubt regarding the distribution of Holy Communion to a specific individual.

### Prior to the Visit

1. The EMHC must not visit an individual if the EMHC is ill. Contact any persons or facilities that might be expecting you to visit to inform them you will not be coming and to reschedule, if necessary.
2. Contact the persons to be visited. Ask each person how he/she is feeling, and if there will be others present so that you will have sufficient hosts for all to receive. Also ask if they can prepare a table with a cloth, candle, and crucifix.
3. Obtain the Consecrated Hosts as described in the preceding section, Reception of Consecrated Hosts.
4. While at the church, consider picking up parish bulletins to share news from the parish.

5. It is recommended that the EMHC engage in a prayer of preparation, e.g., the Prayer of Preparation for the Minister in the *Communion of the Sick* by Liturgical Press.

## The Visit

1. Arrive at the scheduled time of the visit to respect the routine or needs of the communicant.
2. Introduce yourself to those who are present and briefly explain what you have come to do. Pay attention to how the person is feeling.
3. If you have no additional visits and would like to spend additional time with a person, perform the Communion Rite prior to visiting.
4. Do not compete with a television, radio, or other distractions. The EMHC should politely ask if these can be turned off or the distractions removed during the service.
5. The EMHC will use the ritual “Communion in Ordinary Circumstances” or “Communion in a Hospital or Institution” from *Communion of the Sick*.
6. Assessing the communicant’s condition, the EMHC should use judgment as to whether to use only the essential parts of the rite, as prescribed in *Communion of the Sick*.
7. Invite those who are present to participate in the prayers. If they feel comfortable, enlist the help of family or friends to do the readings.
8. If the person has difficulty swallowing, offer the communicant the host, or a small piece of the host and have a cup of water handy (see Special Situations below).
9. In whatever setting, the EMHC should be mindful of the importance of praying with the communicant(s). Specifically, the EMHC is called upon to help them to pray.
10. Ask if there is anything the parish can do for them if they need to see a priest for the Sacraments of Reconciliation or Anointing of the Sick.
11. Thank the person/family for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.
12. When appropriate, encourage the communicant to attend Mass at his/her parish. If the parish offers a transportation service, the EMHC should offer to arrange transportation.

## What Not to Do

1. Do not stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
2. It is never allowed for the EMHC to delegate anyone else to administer the Eucharist. For example, EMHC may not permit a parent, spouse, or child of a sick person administer the Eucharist to the communicant (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* 159).
3. EMHC should not bring oils or holy water to their Communion visits. Sprinkling with holy water during the Communion rite is limited to Priests and Deacons (see *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, no. 82). Holy water may be taken to the communicant for personal use.
4. EMHC should never include an imposition of hands in the rite of Holy Communion.

5. EMHC do not include a blessing in the rite of Holy Communion. Rather, the EMHC invokes “God’s blessing and makes the sign of the cross on himself or herself” while using the formula prescribed in the rite for non-ordinary ministers.
6. Even if the resident asks for assistance, an EMHC should never attempt to move a resident or assist in transferring from a chair to bed, use the restroom, etc. Always call a nurse or aide to assist the resident.

## Special Situations

1. **Communicant cannot receive.** If the communicant cannot receive for whatever reason, do not leave the Consecrated Host with someone else. Instead, the EMHC should reschedule the visit.
2. **Communicant is child.** EMHC may bring Holy Communion to properly prepared children at home or a facility. However, children must have had their First Communion.
3. **Communicant is Gluten Intolerant.** When appropriate and in consultation with the priest or deacon, EMHC can make accommodation to distribute the Body of Christ with a low-gluten Consecrated Host. The use of a separate pyx and cleansing hands between communions to avoid cross contamination of low gluten and regular hosts is required.
4. **Communicant has difficulty swallowing.** In cases of communicants with swallowing difficulties, the EMHC should consult with the family concerning the condition of the person regarding swallowing. Never leave the room until the person has consumed the host. The EMHC should consider the following options:
  - a) If the communicant’s difficulty in swallowing is not severe, water may be offered to the person receiving Communion to aid in swallowing the host.
  - b) A small portion of the host can be offered if the person is incapable of consuming the entire host. The remaining portion of that host must be consumed by someone who is participating in the rite and is properly disposed, or to a communicant at another visit.
  - c) If a communicant cannot receive via a Consecrated Host, the communicant may receive Holy Communion via a few drops of the Most Precious Blood. If this situation arises, the EMHC must contact his/her pastor to arrange for clergy to administer the Sacrament.
5. **Communicant is near death.** Viaticum is the celebration of the Eucharist with a dying person. In the case of necessity and with at least the presumed permission of the parish priest, the EMHC can bring the Sacrament to the sick in the form of Viaticum, subsequently notifying the parish priest that he/she did so (*CIC 911 §2*).

## Accidents during Distribution

1. If a Consecrated Host falls to the ground during distribution of Holy Communion, the EMHC should pick it up immediately and consume it then, or after distribution is over. It should never be put back in the vessel to be given to another communicant.

2. If the EMHC concludes that a Consecrated Host is inconsumable because it has been seriously soiled or the resident spits the host out, the EMHC should place it in a purifier, and return it to the parish for proper disposition by a priest or deacon.

## AFTER THE VISIT

The EMHC should be aware of specific requests the communicant may present, especially regarding receiving the Sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation. Such requests should be communicated to the pastor. Also, the EMHC should notify the pastor, deacon, or parish team lead in the event:

1. There is any uncertainty of an individual's ability to receive Holy Communion.
2. An individual is transferred from his/her residence to a care facility or is discharged from a facility and has requested a visit from the parish at his/her private home.
3. An individual is now receiving services from hospice.
4. An individual has died or no longer needs to have visits made to the facility or the home.

## Repose of Consecrated Hosts

1. It is recommended that EMHC calculate and carry the exact or reasonable estimate of the number of Consecrated Hosts required before visiting the sick, to avoid the need to fraction hosts or to repose remaining hosts.
2. In situations where the EMHC realizes there will be one or two Consecrated Hosts remaining at the end of his/her visits, it is possible to ask the last communicants visited to consume two hosts.
3. When Consecrated Hosts remain after all visits are completed, the EMHC must return them to the church to be reposed in a tabernacle:
  - a) EMHC must remain with the Blessed Sacrament until it can be properly reposed. However, they cannot store Consecrated Hosts at their homes or at any location other than the tabernacle in a parish church.
  - b) The EMHC must go directly to the church without stops and should avoid non-sacred activities such as listening to the radio or non-emergency phone conversations.
  - c) The EMHC must not leave Consecrated Hosts in the sacristy, parish office, or rectory under the assumption that the priest will eventually care for them.
  - d) The EMHC should notify a priest or deacon in advance to coordinate a time for the priest or deacon to receive any remaining Consecrated Hosts from the EMHC and repose them in the tabernacle.
4. An empty pyx should be purified after use if any particles of the Blessed Sacrament remain, as any fragments of the Host left in the pyx, regardless of size, are still the divine presence in the Blessed Sacrament. However, only ordinary ministers of the Holy Communion and duly instituted acolytes can purify a pyx (*Redemptionis Sacramentum*)

119). If you notice particles of the Blessed Sacrament remaining in your pyx, you should present it to a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte for purification at the next reasonable opportunity.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING COMMUNION IN FACILITIES**

### **Communion in a Hospital or Care Facility**

There will be situations, particularly in large institutions with many communicants, when the minister should consider alternative means so that the rite of communion is not diminished to the absolute minimum. In such cases the following alternatives should be considered (*Pastoral Care of the Sick* 78):

1. Where possible, the residents may be gathered in groups in one or more areas; and additional ministers of communion may assist, provided they are mandated EMHC.
2. When it is not possible to celebrate the full rite, the rite for Communion in a Hospital or Institution may be used. If it is convenient, however, the minister may add elements from the rite for ordinary circumstances, for example, a Scripture reading.

In care facilities where there are a larger number of communicants who able to gather in one location, a Communion Service may be appropriate. Please contact the pastor or parish point of contact for EMHC ministry outside Mass.

### **Communion at Prison and Detention Facilities**

In general, bringing communion to the incarcerated is the same as the guidelines that are provided above. However, there are special considerations that must be made. For example, in general, the Blessed Sacrament is distributed during a diocesan approved communion service. Also, detention facilities are highly secured and require either state or county government approval prior to entrance, and each facility will have its own security system and processes. Therefore, it is imperative to work with the prison and jail ministry within the diocese if you are interested in working with the incarcerated, as this will require additional training and background checks. We encourage your participation in this ministry.

