

WHAT DOES AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER DO IF SOMEONE APPROACHES THEM TO RECEIVE COMMUNION WHO IS NOT ELIGIBLE TO DO SO?

A noted canonist suggests: "If a minister of communion knows for certain that a person is not baptized, he or she should not give the person communion but politely say, 'You must be baptized to receive communion.' Only the baptized can validly receive Holy Communion. In the case of a baptized person who may be ineligible for some reason, I think it is better to give them communion, since they might actually be eligible on that occasion (Code of Canon Law cc. 844 on non-Catholics receiving). Then, the pastor should be notified, and he can explain to the person, if this is likely to occur again, the reason for the ineligibility (Code of Canon Law cc. 912-917 and 844) and what may be done, if anything, to become eligible."

The presumption on the part of the minister is that the recipient has a right to receive Holy Communion and should not be denied.

For the complete guidelines from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Non-Catholics and Holy Communion, please see the opening pages of your parish's hymnal or go to: <http://www.usccb.org/liturgy/q&a/mass/communion.shtml> .

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO PREPARE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION?

In addition to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion*, both of which are published by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, the *Introduction to the Order of Mass* by the same publisher is a fine resource for gaining a deeper understanding of the Mass. *The Joy of Being a Eucharistic Minister* by Mitch Finley (Resurrection Press) and *The Ministry of Communion* (2nd edition) from the Collegeville Ministry Series (The Liturgical Press) are also helpful resources. The Prayer, Worship and Evangelization Office has other materials as well as presenters available for the formation and training of the ministers.

For more information or with any questions, please contact:

Office for Prayer, Worship, and Evangelization
Archdiocese of Milwaukee
3501 South Lake Drive
Milwaukee, WI 53207

414-769-3349
800-769-9373 (x349)
(Within the 10 county Archdiocese)

oremus@archmil.org
www.archmil.org

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION AT MASS

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



ARCHDIOCESE  OF MILWAUKEE

OFFICE FOR PRAYER, WORSHIP, AND EVANGELIZATION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The formation of the People of God and the ministers of the altar must, therefore, be unlike any other educational endeavor. Liturgical formation “must above all be spiritual,” though a familiarity with the rites and patterns of the prayer of the Mass is essential. Good liturgy is the product not so much of a well-known rubric as much as a well-trained heart. (Introduction to the Order of Mass)

In this ministry, you must be examples of Christian living in faith and conduct; you must strive to grow in holiness through this sacrament of unity and love. Remember that, though many, we are one body because we share the one bread and one cup. As ministers of Holy Communion be, therefore, especially observant of the Lord’s command to love your neighbor. For when he gave his body as food to his disciples, he said to them: “This is my commandment, that you should love one another as I have loved you.” (Book of Blessings # 1875).

The above paragraphs highlight the Church’s vision of Eucharistic ministry. The ongoing renewal of the liturgy invites us to a deeper understanding of the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection and its connection to our daily lives. In the spirit of that continuing renewal, we present this series of Questions and Answers regarding the role of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass.

WHO IS AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER OF HOLY COMMUNION AT MASS?

It is easier to answer that question by first stating who are the *ordinary* ministers of communion. Bishops, priests and deacons, by virtue of their ordination, are the ordinary or usual ministers of communion at Mass. When the size of the assembly or the incapacity of the ordinary ministers requires it, the priest may call upon *extraordinary* (“out of the ordinary”) ministers to assist him in the distribution of Holy Communion.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS AT MASS?

They approach the altar as the priest is receiving communion. They themselves receive communion from either the priest, deacon or one of the other ministers. Then they assist in the distribution of the Body and Blood to the assembly. After communion, they may consume, at their place of distribution, any consecrated wine that remains in their cups. They may also assist with the purification of the vessels.

WHO MAY BECOME AN EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER?

In the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Archbishop Dolan has determined that all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion must be fully initiated members of the Church; that is, they must have received the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and holy communion. The rite for commissioning is found in the *Book of Blessings* #1875.

WHAT SHOULD A COMMUNION MINISTER DO IF A HOST IS DROPPED OR THE PRECIOUS BLOOD IS SPILLED?

If the Eucharistic Bread or some particle of it falls, it should be picked up reverently by the minister. The Consecrated Bread may be consumed by the minister or completely dissolved in water which is then poured down the sacrarium. Should Consecrated Wine be spilled, the area should be washed and the water poured into the sacrarium. In either case, the actions of the Eucharistic Minister should be guided by reverence for the sacred species and the desire not to embarrass the communicant.

MAY A NON-CATHOLIC RECEIVE HOLY COMMUNION?

As Catholics, we believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of our oneness in faith, life and worship. Members of churches with whom we are not yet fully united are therefore not ordinarily invited to participate in Holy Communion.

