

## LAY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION



preparing the table.

Ministers may also be requested in the absence of a priest to take communion to the dying in the form of viaticum.

Taking communion to those in hospital may have more specialised requirements, and ministers should liaise with hospital staff ahead of time, particularly if several patients are to receive on the same occasion.

14. *Difficulties and accidents*

Some sick persons can only take a tiny sliver of a host. In the event of a sick person rejecting a host from the mouth, the minister places the host in a cloth and, returning to the church, leaves it in a bowl of water in the tabernacle. When the host has dissolved the contents of the bowl can be emptied into the sacrarium.

Some sick persons can only receive under the form of wine, and a suitable phial or sealed container is used. The minister is responsible for purifying the vessel before leaving the house.

15. *Giving a blessing*

A lay minister may always give a blessing to someone not receiving communion who requests one. A suitable gesture of blessing should be used - e.g. a hand placed on the shoulder or held over the head (but not touching it, for reasons of hygiene) - accompanied by an appropriate form of words - e.g. "May almighty God bless you and give you peace." Ministers should not make the sign of the cross over, or in front of, communicants receiving a blessing, and especially not when holding a host.

16. *Commissioning ceremony*

This is carried out by the parish priest or the Dean, unless the Bishop makes arrangements to commission ministers in the Cathedral or elsewhere.

17. *Duration of ministry*

Lay ministers of communion are appointed for a period of three years. The appointment may be renewed, or not, at the discretion of the parish priest or pastoral supervisor.

18. *Regular meetings of ministers*

Ministers are to meet together periodically for prayer, reflection, mutual support and ongoing formation. There must be a parish day of recollection for ministers of communion at least once a year.

1. *Why lay ministers?*

- (i) To assist at Mass when the number of communicants is large and there are not enough priests or deacons to distribute communion within a reasonable space of time (cf. *Inaestimabile Donum*), or when the priest is sick or disabled in some way.
- (ii) To assist as a minister of communion at celebrations in the absence of a priest (but **not** simultaneously to lead these services - see diocesan guidelines available separately).
- (iii) To assist in taking communion to the sick.

Pope Paul VI introduced this ministry with the instructions *Fidei custos* (1969) and especially *Immensae caritatis* (1973).

2. *Qualifications*

Lay ministers of communion need proper formation, both spiritual and practical, for their responsibilities. They should be distinguished by their Christian living, their faith and their morals. They should always strive to be worthy of this privilege of serving the people of God, and should always be an example of prayerfulness and reverence towards the Blessed Sacrament.

In the Diocese of Portsmouth, ministers of communion can be selected as soon as they are 15 years of age, provided they have received the sacrament of Confirmation and proper formation for their ministry.

Ministers are normally chosen by the parish priest or other person responsible for the pastoral care of the community. No one is to be selected whose appointment would cause disquiet among the people.

3. *Be present for the entire Mass or service*

The presence of the ministers for the entire Mass is a sign that they are part of the worshipping assembly which is structured according to a variety of functions and ministries (cf. GIRM 91).

Ministers should ideally arrive 10 minutes before the service begins, and sign in or make their presence known in whatever way is customary.

4. *Place in the church*

Ministers should take their place among the general body of the people, somewhere convenient for reaching the sanctuary easily.

GIRM = 2005 edition of the General Instruction on the Roman Missal. Questions on these guidelines should be addressed to the diocese's Director of Liturgy.

5. *Dress*  
No distinctive garb or insignia are used. Ministers should dress in a manner appropriate to their holy ministry and one which is acceptable in the locality.
6. *When to approach the altar*  
Ministers take their place near the altar during or immediately after the Sign of Peace. They may help, when necessary, with the distribution of the consecrated bread into the various vessels.
7. *Taking ciboria from the tabernacle*  
Whenever possible, bread for communion should be consecrated at the actual Mass being celebrated (GIRM 85). If, exceptionally, hosts from the tabernacle are to be used, the ciborium is taken from the tabernacle during the "Lamb of God" and placed on the altar as a reminder that Holy Communion is communion in the sacrifice.
8. *Receiving communion*  
When the priest has received communion himself, he gives communion to the ministers under the form of bread and under the form of wine (unless for some good reason a person is only receiving under one of those forms).  
It is not permitted to serve oneself from a chalice on the altar (GIRM 160). The chalice should be received from the priest or deacon or another minister.  
In some parishes, ministers do not receive until the end of communion when all the people have received. This is also always the case at celebrations in the absence of a priest.
9. *Giving communion*  
The minister raises the consecrated bread or the chalice slightly and shows it to the communicant, saying *The Body of Christ* or *The Blood of Christ* as appropriate. The communicant replies *Amen* and receives the sacrament.  
The minister should have eye-contact with the communicant. The practice whereby the consecrated bread or the chalice is held up so high that communicant and minister cannot see each other's eyes is not recommended, and can lead to accidents.  
Reverence in the manner of giving communion will help to elicit from the communicant a heartfelt "Amen" of faith, welcome and commitment to the Lord.  
"Giving communion" means "creating" communion, facilitating the kind of atmosphere in which the communicant will more easily experience this moment as a moment of deeply intimate communion with the Lord and of bonding more closely with one's fellow-communicants.
10. *After communion*  
When the ministers have finished giving communion, they place the vessels on a side table (GIRM 279) or take them to a side chapel or the sacristy where this is customary. Before doing so, however, any remaining consecrated bread is to be consumed, or placed in a ciborium and replaced in the tabernacle, and any remaining consecrated wine is to be consumed immediately before the vessel is taken away (GIRM 279). Chalices should be left covered with a purificator.  
Purification of the vessels should generally take place after Mass is over, when the people have left (GIRM 163).
11. *Only minister at one Mass on any particular day*  
This helps avoid ministering at communion becoming burdensome and also promotes a sense of reverence for this ministry. Sufficient numbers of ministers should be commissioned, which also allows for a wider involvement of people in this ministry and helps to foster a deeper awareness of the holiness of the general body of the faithful.
12. *Ministers of communion should not have another ministry at the same celebration*  
This is in keeping with the Church's vision of being a community of different orders and ministries, avoids the impression that a small number of people are "substitute priests", and once again makes for a wider involvement of people in the different ministries.  
So, for example, unless it is absolutely unavoidable because of sudden sickness or unexpected absence, a reader or a member of the choir or a server should not also act as a minister of communion in the same celebration.
13. *Bringing communion to the sick and housebound*  
Lay ministers should use the special rite from the ritual.  
It is most desirable that the consecrated bread be taken directly from the Mass, as a sign that those unable to be present are united to the sacrifice itself, and as a sign of the supporting prayers and love of the community gathered for Mass. (The perception that the sick and housebound are part of the community will also be aided by including them in the intercessions.)  
After communion, before the end of Mass, at a suitable time when the people's attention can easily be drawn to what is happening, the priest distributes one or more pyxes filled with pieces of bread consecrated at that Mass, and may use suitable words as the minister is sent forth. The minister may depart there and then, or after the final blessing and dismissal. If there are several of them, it is fitting that they join in the concluding procession of the other liturgical ministers as it leaves.  
Ministers should be sensitive to the traditional signs associated with communion for the sick and housebound, and their value in fostering reverence for the Blessed Sacrament. A table should be prepared with a white cloth, lighted candles, etc., if possible before the minister arrives with the Blessed Sacrament. If this is not possible, the minister may assist the sick or housebound person in