

*St. James Community of Faith
Extraordinary Minister*

Fall, 2016

*"If you cannot find Christ in the beggar at
the Church door, you will not find in the
Chalice". ~John Chrysostom*

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

"Give them some food yourselves." - Mark 3:37a

You have agreed to serve Saint James Parish as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion during Mass and with those who are sick and homebound. In doing so, you take your place in a long line of disciples who enjoyed the company of Jesus, listened his word, wondered about his commands, cared for his people, and did what he asked.

This ministry puts you at the center of the Church's life. The celebration of the Eucharist on the Lord's Day is our most important activity. We gather on the day of the Resurrection to express our belief in eternal life. We listen to the Word of God. We give thanks for life and salvation.

Your love for Christ draws you to the Eucharist. Your love for the Church draws you to liturgical service. As an extraordinary minister, you are integral to the sacramental sharing that is the highlight of the Mass.

At the miracle of the loaves and fishes, Jesus wanted to feed the multitude, and he commanded his disciples to give them something to eat. At the Last Supper he commanded those same disciples to eat and drink his body and blood. The extraordinary minister serves at the will of Christ and the Church to serve the Communion that sanctifies the people of God.

1. Theology and History of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

Baptism is the foundation of all ministry in the Church. Before you are an extraordinary minister, you are baptized member of the Body of Christ, with all the attendant blessings and duties.

Baptism helps you personally: it cleanses you from sin and incorporates you into the Body of Christ. Baptism also gives you responsibilities toward others: it assigns you a place among the faithful who worship at the Eucharist and who serve their neighbor in the name of Christ. Baptism summons you to worship and service.

Everyone participates at Mass on some level. All sing the songs, make the responses, proclaim the Creed, and observe moments of silence. But your task as an extraordinary minister at Mass is one example of service to the people of God in the celebration of the Mass.

During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, extraordinary ministers assist the smooth execution of the distribution of Holy Communion. They do this only in the last part of the service, but they participate throughout as a member of the priestly people.

Extraordinary ministers also bring the sacrament to those who are sick and homebound. In this way those who are unable to participate in Sunday Mass with the entire assembly can still share in the communion of sacrament and friendship.

The History of the Ministry

In the early days of the Church, there were fewer restrictions about who distributed Holy Communion. For example, a sick person could have asked a friend to bring the sacrament. One of the early martyrs of the Church, St. Tarcisius, was killed while bringing Holy Communion to the sick as an acolyte. But by the Middle Ages the ministry was restricted to bishops and priests. Deacons were considered the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and on some occasions they administered the Blood of Christ from the Chalice.

The Second Vatican Council opened up the ministry of distributing Holy Communion. In 1969, the Vatican announced several reasons for expanding Communion ministry to the laity.

- Outside the Mass, people needed access to Holy Communion when an Ordinary minister was not available.
- The usual minister was sometimes impeded by poor health, advanced age or demands of the pastoral ministry;
- Sometimes the number of faithful wishing to receive Holy Communion at Mass was so great that the celebration was taking too long.

2. The Qualities of the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

To perform this ministry, the extraordinary minister must be the right kind person: a baptized Catholic in good standing with the Church. The minister will be a person of faith, who believes in God, follows Christ, and trusts in the Holy Spirit. The minister will have a genuine love for the Eucharist, in order to share the joy of Holy Communion with all partake.

Some people feel unworthy of this ministry. They think that they should not be allowed to touch the Body of Christ, to handle the sacred chalice, or to place these elements in the hands of the faithful. These feelings are normal. After all, who is worthy of this great mystery? Every one of us, before we receive Holy Communion, says, "Lord, I am not worthy..." No one distributes Holy Communion without having first received it. In the mysterious presence of the risen Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, an extraordinary minister is called by God to handle what no one otherwise dares to touch.

3. Spirituality and Formation of the Extraordinary Minister of the Holy Communion

Here are some ideas for your spiritual growth. Develop your love for Christ and the Church through the Mass, prayer, and service.

- As with any Catholic, the single most important spiritual exercise of your life is regular participation at Sunday Mass. Your weekly commitment to the Eucharist demonstrates your faith in the Resurrection, your belief in the real presence of Christ, and your love for your parish community.
- In addition to participating at Mass, private prayer is essential in the life of any Catholic. It is even more so for the one who serves the Body and Blood of Christ.
- Try using the Sunday Lectionary as a basis for prayer during the week. Read over the Scriptures slowly and prayerfully. Keep a log of what words or phrases strike you. Read the passages again. Reflect on what God may be telling you through these readings.
- You may pray daily with others as well. If you live with members of your family, gather for prayer before a meal, late at night, or whenever it is convenient.
- The Liturgy of the Hours is the Church's official prayer to mark the shifting parts of a day.
- Because your ministry is tied to the Eucharist, you also may benefit from Eucharist devotions. If is possible, pray before the Blessed Sacrament at church.
- Watch for workshops that explain more about the Eucharist and the liturgy of the Church. Make a retreat each year.
- Make use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Develop a habit of spiritual reading.
- You will grow in your ministry if you serve the Body of Christ outside of the liturgy as well. Look for opportunities to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty, and to wash the feet of others, as Jesus did.

4. Serving as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

It is normal, in fact, expected, for cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, lectors and readers to extensive preparation for their Sunday ministry. For extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, there's little to rehearse, but is much to prepare for.

- Your parish depends on you to know when you are scheduled to serve, and to be there on time.
- After "The Lamb of God", the extraordinary ministers move towards the altar so they receive Holy Communion before they begin to distribute either the Precious Body or Precious Blood.
- When the lay ministers approach the sanctuary, the distribution Holy Communion to the extraordinary ministers can be more streamlined. The priest can give the Body of Christ to each minister, while the deacon follows and gives each of them the Blood of Christ. Then both priest and deacon can return to the altar to distribute the vessels to the extraordinary ministers.
- Everything you do during Mass matters. Receive Holy Communion in such a way that any Catholic who watches you can imitate what you do. Receive with reverence, dignity, and attention.
- Find your station. Everyone who is distributing Holy Communion should have a clear understanding of where his or her assigned station will be.
- As you begin to distribute Holy Communion, focus on each communicant as if he or she were the only person in line. Make eye contact, say the person's name if you know. Elevate the host slightly, between your thumb and first finger, and say in a distinct, but not loud voice, "The Body of Christ." The communicant bows and responds, "Amen." Then place the host in the outstretched hands or on the tongue of the communicant. When presenting the chalice, extend and elevate the chalice slightly as the communicant approaches, saying his or her name if you know, with the words, "The Blood of Christ." The communicant bows and says "Amen" and takes the chalice from your hands to receive Communion, then hands the chalice back to you.
- For those who, for whatever reason feel they cannot receive, they will cross their arms in front of them. Please make a sign of the cross saying "God Loves You and I Love you too". You can do this for children and babies as well.
- Be aware of those who are not able to come forward to receive Holy Communion - the elderly or people with other physical limitation.

- When you finish distributing Holy Communion, hand the patens or ciboria to the priest or deacon. The cups should be returned to the credence table.
 - **If you have the cup and, for whatever reason cannot consume what is left, it is perfectly acceptable to ask another minister to help you.**
- Return to your seat.
- After Mass return to the sacristy and make sure that everything is washed and back in place.

Questions:

1. How did it happen that you felt called to serve the Church as an extraordinary minister? Did someone ask you? Did you offer your services?

2. Looking back over your life, what significant steps led you to this ministry? How did you develop your love for the Eucharist? How did you experience the desire for service?

3. What kind of service am I doing right now that deepen my appreciation for the Body of Christ?

4. How is a meal at home like the meal at Mass? Who performs different "ministries"? What "word" is shared? What prayers are said?
