

Church Legislation and Practice on Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs)

Immenseae Caritatis (1973) - Pope Paul VI

I. Special Ministers Of The Eucharist

There are several situations in which a shortage of (ordained) ministers of communion has been pointed out:

- within Mass because of a great crowd of people or some disability of the celebrant;
- outside Mass when distance makes it difficult to bring communion, especially as viaticum to the sick in danger of death; or when the sheer number of sick people, especially in hospitals or similar institutions, requires several ministers.

In order, then, that the faithful who are in the state of grace and rightly and devoutly wish to share in the sacred meal may not be deprived of this sacramental aid and solace, Pope Paul VI has decided it opportune to authorize special ministers who will be empowered to give communion to themselves and others of the faithful, under the exact and specified conditions here listed.

I. Local Ordinaries possess the faculty enabling them to permit fit persons ... to give communion to themselves and others of the faithful and to carry it to the sick residing at home:

- a. whenever no priest, deacon, or acolyte is available; (only time Communion could be given to oneself)
- b. whenever the same ministers are impeded from administering communion because of another pastoral ministry, ill-health, or old age;
- c. whenever the number of faithful wishing to receive communion is so great that the celebration of Mass or the giving of communion outside Mass would take too long.

Code of Canon Law (1983) - Pope John Paul II

Can. 910 §1. The ordinary minister of holy communion is a bishop, presbyter (priest), or deacon.
§2. The extraordinary minister of holy communion is an (instituted) acolyte or another member of the Christian faithful designated according to the norm of can. 230, §3.

Can. 1008 By divine institution, some of the Christian faithful are marked with an indelible character and constituted as sacred ministers by the sacrament of holy orders. They are thus consecrated and deputed so that, each according to his own grade, they may serve the People of God by a new and specific title.

Can. 1009 §1. The orders are the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate.
§3. Those who are constituted in the order of the episcopate or the presbyterate receive the mission and capacity to act in the person of Christ the Head, whereas deacons are empowered to serve the People of God in the ministries of the liturgy, the word and charity

Redemptionis Sacramentum (2004) - Pope John Paul II

1. The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

[154.] As has already been recalled, “the only minister who can confect the Sacrament of the Eucharist *in persona Christi* is a validly ordained Priest”. Hence the name “minister of the Eucharist” belongs properly to the Priest alone. Moreover, also by reason of their sacred Ordination, the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are the Bishop, the Priest and the Deacon, to whom it belongs therefore to administer Holy Communion to the lay members of Christ’s faithful during the celebration of Mass. In this way their ministerial office in the Church is fully and accurately brought to light, and the sign value of the Sacrament is made complete.

[155.] In addition to the ordinary ministers there is the formally instituted acolyte, who by virtue of his institution is an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion even outside the celebration of Mass. If, moreover, reasons of real necessity prompt it, another lay member of Christ’s faithful may also be delegated by the diocesan Bishop, in accordance with the norm of law, for one occasion or for a specified time, and an

appropriate formula of blessing may be used for the occasion. This act of appointment, however, does not necessarily take a liturgical form, nor, if it does take a liturgical form, should it resemble sacred Ordination in any way. Finally, in special cases of an unforeseen nature, permission can be given for a single occasion by the Priest who presides at the celebration of the Eucharist.

[156.] This function is to be understood strictly according to the name by which it is known, that is to say, that of extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, and not “special minister of Holy Communion” nor “extraordinary minister of the Eucharist” nor “special minister of the Eucharist”, by which names the meaning of this function is unnecessarily and improperly broadened.

[157.] If there is usually present a sufficient number of sacred ministers for the distribution of Holy Communion, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may not be appointed. Indeed, in such circumstances, those who may have already been appointed to this ministry should not exercise it. The practice of those Priests is reprobated who, even though present at the celebration, abstain from distributing Communion and hand this function over to laypersons.

[158.] Indeed, the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion may administer Communion only when the Priest and Deacon are lacking, when the Priest is prevented by weakness or advanced age or some other genuine reason, or when the number of faithful coming to Communion is so great that the very celebration of Mass would be unduly prolonged. This, however, is to be understood in such a way that a brief prolongation, considering the circumstances and culture of the place, is not at all a sufficient reason.

[159.] It is never allowed for the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion to delegate anyone else to administer the Eucharist, as for example a parent or spouse or child of the sick person who is the communicant.

[160.] Let the diocesan Bishop give renewed consideration to the practice in recent years regarding this matter, and if circumstances call for it, let him correct it or define it more precisely. Where such extraordinary ministers are appointed in a widespread manner out of true necessity, the diocesan Bishop should issue special norms by which he determines the manner in which this function is to be carried out in accordance with the law, bearing in mind the tradition of the Church.

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2011) - Pope Benedict XVI

GIRM 100. In the absence of an instituted acolyte, there may be deputed lay ministers to serve at the altar and assist the Priest and the Deacon; these carry the cross, the candles, the thurible, the bread, the wine, and the water, or who are even deputed to distribute Holy Communion as extraordinary ministers.

GIRM 162. In the distribution of Communion, the Priest may be assisted by other Priests who happen to be present. If such Priests are not present and there is a truly large number of communicants, the Priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, that is, duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been duly deputed for this purpose.

GIRM 191. A duly instituted acolyte, as an extraordinary minister, may, if necessary, assist the Priest in distributing Communion to the people. If Communion is given under both kinds, in the absence of a Deacon, the acolyte (or lay minister) administers the chalice to the communicants or holds the chalice if Communion is given by intinction.

GIRM 284. When Communion is distributed under both kinds:

- a) the chalice is usually administered by a Deacon or, in the absence of a Deacon, by a Priest, or even by a duly instituted acolyte or another extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, or by one of the faithful who, in a case of necessity, has been entrusted with this duty for a single occasion;
- b) whatever may remain of the Blood of Christ is consumed at the altar by the Priest or the Deacon or the duly instituted acolyte (not lay minister) who ministered the chalice. The same then purifies, wipes, and arranges the sacred vessels in the usual way.

Norms for Communion under Both Kinds - 52. ... When there are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution with permission of the Diocesan Bishop.