

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNION MINISTERS TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND

Contents

Qualifications	2
Selection of Ministers of Communion for the Sick	3
Training	3
Procedures and Pastoral Notes Concerning the Rite of Communion for the Sick before Visiting	3
As you begin the visit:	4
The Rite:	4
Practical Considerations for Ministers of Communion for the Sick.....	4
Acceptance of Gifts	5
Questions Most Commonly Asked about Bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound	5

Communion Ministers to the Sick and Homebound are regularly appointed Communion Ministers assigned to the Catholic Parish of St. John the Baptist. These ministers have volunteered to bring the Body of Christ to those unable to receive in any other manner. This is truly a spiritually rewarding experience for all involved. Communion is scheduled to be brought to those who are sick, in nursing homes or homebound weekly at a regularly appointed time. At any time you are unable to complete the assignment, please get a substitute or call the coordinator of this ministry.

Sunday, after masses, is the recommended time to schedule this ministry. The key to the tabernacle is in place and hosts are conveniently available.

However, Sunday may not be convenient for you or your recipients. If a weekday is selected, a key to the tabernacle is located in the closet at the rear of the confessional. After the hosts are obtained, return the key to the hook. Consecration of the hosts may also be done at weekday masses by placing your pyx on the altar with the number of hosts inside needed for taking communion to the homebound, nursing home, or hospital.

You have been provided with two laminated copies of the Rite of the Communion Service to Shut-ins. A ministry guideline card is also available on the shelf in the confessional. It is recommended that you follow this outline as closely as possible. Bring your Bible or Daily Reading Guide and read a passage at the prescribed time. You may also use the reading provided on the laminated guide. At all times your ministry is subject to the condition and responsiveness of the recipient. Please make sure they are able to consume the host and, if necessary, adjust your guidelines for their comfort, understanding and convenience.

At nursing homes, if several of the residents can gather in one room for the service, it makes for a rewarding community type atmosphere. The Communion Ministers should check with the

operators of the home regularly to find out if there are any new Catholics in residence. These new residents should be added to your list and reported to the coordinator.

Timing of your visit is for your convenience and that of your recipients. Observe their condition and shorten or lengthen your time with them as you deem best for all. Remember, many lead a lonely life during the day and welcome the time you spend with them.

If there are any problems or questions please call the coordinator. Thank you for being involved in this ministry.

To proclaim God's word in the midst of the assembly and to minister the Eucharist to one's fellow pilgrims are honored offices in the believing community. Those who carry Holy Communion to the sick and persons otherwise confined, therefore, continue the community's act of worship. They extend the community's embrace to include those unable to be physically present. It is most fitting that they go directly from the Sunday or daily Eucharist to the sick or homebound.

Qualifications

Ministers of Communion for the sick should:

- be appointed by the Archbishop as Communion Ministers, renewable every three years
- be sincere Catholic Christians, persons known for their goodness, who seriously follow the Christian way of life. They should be at ease with other people.
- be faithful Catholics who have received the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist, and participate faithfully in the sacramental and liturgical life of the Church.
- foster their own devotion to the Eucharist and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their own devotion and reverent and prayerful manner.
- possess a certain degree of psychological maturity. They will need further education in the Church's attitude toward suffering and death, sensitive pastoral ministry to the sick, and familiarity with the rite. In addition they need the ability to keep confidences and not discuss indiscriminately the condition of persons or their homes. They should be able to deal with the sick or the elderly in a compassionate, cheerful and sensitive way.
- Maintain and nourish own spiritual life and growth through such means as, daily prayer and reflection, devotions, liturgy of the hours, personal retreats, and holy hour during times of Adoration.
- Complete initial orientation and training for Homebound Communion Ministry. Attend meetings and retreats with other Homebound Communion Ministers.
- Complete Safe Environment training and paperwork.

- Read the Ministerial Code of Conduct.

Selection of Ministers of Communion for the Sick

The Christian Community who calls forth ministers of Communion for the sick must also be instructed, so that the ministry of Communion for the sick may be fully appreciated as service at the Lord's banquet.

Ministers of Communion are appointed for three-year terms. Often after three years of service, it is helpful for the ministers to evaluate their service and take time for renewal and rest. If desired, they may be commissioned for another three-year term.

Ministers of Communion for the sick are not to serve until they have been authorized to do so by the Archbishop and installed at a parish Mass.

Training

All who serve as ministers of Communion for the sick must attend special training sessions to become aware of all theological, pastoral, and procedural aspects of their service. Having appropriate knowledge and training will help ministers to function effectively and bring confidence and joy to their experience.

The ministers should be properly instructed, and should distinguish themselves by their Christian life. In preparing persons for this ministry, it would be good to help them grow in a number of areas of Christian living: in their understanding of the Eucharist, of ministry and service in the Church. It is important for them to realize the need of good celebration as a sign and occasion of faith. The candidates should also be instructed in the ways of giving Communion, and in the manner of celebrating when they bring Communion to the sick. Personal prayer, scripture reading and witness are necessary for anyone who seeks to be a worthy minister of the Church.

The Eucharist for Communion outside a church is to be carried in a pyx or other covered vessel; the vesture of the minister and the manner of carrying the Eucharist should be appropriate and in accord with local circumstances.

Communion must be given by the authorized minister, who shows the particle of consecrated bread to the communicants and gives it to them, saying "The Body of Christ," to which the communicants reply "Amen." There should be no variations on saying, "The Body of Christ," such as "This is the Body of Christ," "Receive the Body of Christ," etc. When distributing the Eucharist in the form of wine, say, "The Blood of Christ."

The Minister will attend an annual retreat, preferably the retreat offered by the parish. The minister will also attend periodic sessions with fellow communion ministers to discuss issues and situations that arise during the course of ministering to their fellow parishioners.

Procedures and Pastoral Notes Concerning the Rite of Communion for the Sick before Visiting

Collect information about the person who is sick and any other helpful information for your visit to the home or hospital.

As you begin the visit:

- Share greetings and introductions; give some ideas from the homily and the bulletin if the person shows interest in the parish.
- After listening to the conditions and desires of the person who is sick, ask if the person desires Communion at this time. Invite the family to receive Communion also. Choose a Scripture reading from the Sunday readings or use the reading on the laminated Rite card. Be aware of the need for short and comforting passages. The reading(s) should help those present to reach a deeper understanding of the mystery of human suffering in relation to the paschal mystery of Christ.

The Rite:

Pace the ritual with sensitivity. Be aware of the sick person's ability to follow. Adapt to the situation of each visit.

If the family suggests setting a simple table with candles, and holy water, agree with this but do not insist upon it when the family is not ready or unfamiliar with the practice.

Give a small portion of the host to a person who has difficulty swallowing. When distributing the Eucharist in a facility, check with the nurse in cases of special feeding.

Wait for the person to swallow the host. Offer water if necessary. Be prepared with a cloth or tissue if the person may have problems.

Take time to pray reverently and to be present with the sick person and the family. Be sensitive to the proper time to depart.

Practical Considerations for Ministers of Communion for the Sick

Know that the relationship with the person who is sick is a key factor. The minister brings the comfort and the concern of Christ.

Be aware of feelings that may arise when you enter a person's home or room, the person's appearance, medical equipment; the environment. When it is difficult to look at the person because of their physical condition, concentrate on their eyes.

Take proper time for introduction and personal sharing. Listen attentively.

If you are uncertain or suspect sensitive conditions, check with the family or the nurse for more information.

Be sensitive to feelings of loneliness and depression. Consider the situation and desires of the person who is sick and make decisions based on this information before beginning the

Communion rite.

Be prepared in the face of refusal or rejection by either the person who is sick or by a family member. Be ready to offer modified services in such cases or a simple Lord's Prayer.

If the person does not wish to share Communion at this time, ask if they would like to share in a short blessing prayer.

Be aware of making referrals when other services are needed. (confessor, counselor, doctor, etc.) Do not try to solve problems. If the sick wish to celebrate the sacrament of penance, encourage them or the family to be in contact with the Parish Office. You might also offer to relay the message yourself.

Keep confidences at all times.

The parish staff or coordinator of Communion ministers for the sick is available to those visiting the sick in order that they might share their feelings and experiences.

Acceptance of Gifts

In the course of visiting a person sometimes gifts or benefits may be offered, as a personal courtesy. Gifts and benefits may be offered out of gratitude and goodwill for a job well done. However, gifts and benefits can also be offered as a subtle form of influence to create a favorable impression or to gain preferential treatment. This in turn may give rise to a conflict of interest and breach of boundaries. Acceptance of a gift or benefit can create a sense of obligation that may compromise the therapeutic relationship.

You may only accept gifts of "negligible value" and very infrequently. If a recipient **insists** on giving a "gift," ask the recipient to give the item to a charitable organization or to make a donation to the church, possibly for the "Communion to the Homebound Ministry."

Questions Most Commonly Asked about Bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound

1. When do I take Holy Communion to the sick person?
It is best to bring Holy Communion directly from the community's celebration of Eucharist in the church to the person in the home. If this is not reasonable, please bring it as soon as possible, showing respect for the presence of Christ, avoiding any activity not in keeping with the reverence due the Blessed Sacrament.
2. If bringing Holy Communion is only part of my visit with the sick or homebound person, should prayer and Communion be at the beginning or end of our time together?
There is no set rule but most people find it more comfortable to spend some time in conversation before sharing prayer and Holy Communion. The conversation could include ideas from the homily and reassurance that the parish community prayerfully supports that person. If the sick or homebound person prefers time for private devotion, it is suggested that you visit before prayer and indicate that you will leave immediately after distribution of

Communion so as to allow time for quiet reflection and devotion. This respects the privacy of the person while also honoring the importance of communal prayer as part of Eucharist.

3. What prayers do I say when I bring Holy Communion to the sick?
It is best to follow the prayers on the laminated Rite card or in the Communion for the sick booklet that is the official rite of the Catholic Church. Since your focus should be on the needs of the sick or homebound person, you may adapt the prayers to fit the situation. Consider the person's illness, pain level, tiredness, and ability to concentrate; also be considerate of others who are responding to that person's physical needs. If longer readings are desired, you may use the scripture reading from the day or Sunday or choose any appropriate reading from the Bible.
4. If others are present, should I invite them to pray and receive Holy Communion with the sick person?
Yes, others should be invited to join in prayer. Those who are Catholic can be invited to receive Holy Communion.
5. Are the sick or homebound required to fast an hour before receiving Communion?
No, those who are advanced in age or who suffer from infirmity, as well as those who take care of them, can receive the Most Holy Eucharist even if they have taken something during the previous hour.¹
6. What if the sick person is unable to swallow the entire host?
Water may be offered to the sick person receiving Holy Communion to aid in swallowing the host. If warranted just a small portion of the host can be offered if the person is too ill to receive the entire host. The remaining portion of that host must be consumed by someone who is participating in the prayer or by you as minister of Communion. Remember that the divine presence in the Blessed Sacrament is the same regardless of the size of the portion of the host.
7. Can I receive Communion when ministering to others?
Yes.² But you can only receive the Eucharist twice a day and one time must be at Mass.³ We do not normally distribute communion to ourselves. If another minister is present, ask them to distribute communion to you.
8. What do I do with any remaining consecrated hosts?
Either consume them privately or return them to the tabernacle.
9. Can I keep the Eucharist at home?
No. The Eucharist can only be reserved in the Tabernacle.⁴ Arrange to pick up the Eucharist

¹ Canon 919, paragraph 3

² *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, Liturgical Press, p. 50

³ Father Petuskey, 2000

⁴ Canon 934 states that the Eucharist can only be reserved in a Church. Canon 935 goes on to say that "it is not licit to keep the Most Holy Eucharist on one's presence or to carry it on a journey unless there is urgent pastoral need and the precepts of the diocesan bishop are preserved."

on the way to a visit and return any remaining immediately afterwards.

10. What should I do if the host is dropped or the person removes it from his/her mouth?

If the host is dropped and there are no health concerns, the host may be picked up and consumed. If the dropped host presents health concerns or the person removes the host from his/her mouth, it should be dissolved in water and the water poured onto the ground in the sacarium at church, not down a drain. Of course, if anyone declines or refuses to receive Holy Communion, you would respect this wish.

11. What do I do with the empty pyx when I am not using it to bring Holy Communion to the Sick?

The pyx should be kept in a safe and respectful place when not in use. Bring the pyx to the community's celebration of Eucharist on the day of visiting the sick. Upon returning home, the Communion Minister should properly purify their pyx and consume the water used for purification. Remember, the Body of Christ is present in the tiny particles that may fall off the host and rest at the bottom of the pyx. As a result, these particles must be treated with the utmost care and concern for they are the sacred body of the Lord. A simple method for purifying a pyx is to run a small amount of water into the empty pyx, swirl the water around in order for the pyx to be fully washed, and then pour the water into a drinking glass which is then consumed by the individual purifying the pyx. Additionally, following proper purification, the pyx should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water on the inside and out⁵. When a minister no longer needs the pyx, it is returned to the parish office or to the Confessional closet.

12. What if the condition of the sick person changes?

Please contact someone on the pastoral staff or call the parish office if there is a change in the condition of the sick person. Someone can arrange for a visit and reception of the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick. Your calls are important and welcome.

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⁵ (St. Dominic Catholic Church, Brookfield, WI, 2012) Procedures for Reception of Low-Gluten Hosts by the Faithful