

# Guidelines for Communion Ministers

(revised August 2011)



Thank you for agreeing to serve the parish in this way. You will note the name change (from Eucharistic Ministers to Communion Ministers). The Church's guidelines want parishes to make it clear that priests and bishops are technically the "Eucharistic Ministers"; deacons and officially installed adult acolytes are "ordinary" Communion Ministers, and all others are considered "extraordinary" Communion Ministers. We will be using the "Communion Ministers" title or "CM" as shorthand for all that.

It is important to review each year the expectations and procedures for those who help distribute communion. The Eucharist is the heart of our worship and you are public witnesses to its meaning. It is important that this service not become merely routine but continually challenge us to deepen our faith, our trust in God, and our appreciation for the Eucharist. One of the chief concerns of the new General Instruction on the Roman Missal (G.I.R.M.) is that we keep the sacredness of the action we are participating in, foremost in our minds.

## DRESS AND DECORUM

1. As a public witness to the Eucharist, our behavior and dress should reflect a real respect for the role we perform. That is why the Church asks that those who are not living the Catholic faith not come forward for this ministry. This does not mean we have to be perfect, only that in general our lives conform to Catholic principles. It is expected as well that you will be a registered member of the parish. At times, for various personal reasons, one goes through a period of uncertainty as to one's relationship with the Church. If that occurs, it is best to take some time off from exercising this role of Communion Minister.

2. Dress should be appropriate for Sundays: no tennis shoes, flip-flops, jeans, T-shirts, sweatshirts, shorts, and so on. For men we ask

that dress slacks and shirt be worn, preferably with a sport coat (except in summer); tie optional. For women we ask that modest dresses or skirts and blouses be worn, or full-length dress pants (no Capri-style) and blouse. Dress as an example for the rest of the community.

3. If you are signing up to be a sub, please be dressed properly. We realize that sometimes you may be asked to be a sub and you feel you would have dressed differently if you would have known you would be in this public role. You should feel free to decline, if you are not properly dressed to serve. In exceptional circumstances, when we need emergency CMs, a different standard of dress might be applicable.

## CHECKING-IN PROCEDURES

1. We check-in by the sacristy of the Church in the room that doubles as the Reconciliation Room. Arrive 10 minutes early and sign-in at the podium. If you are there, subbing for someone specifically, sign-in your name and then list the initials of the person you are subbing for in the column on the right titled "Subbing For". If you are not scheduled but can be a substitute, please approach the Mass captain near the sign-in room before Mass and let them know. The Mass captain will make sure there are 5 CMs (7 at the 9:30 Mass and on special occasions) and the lector will announce their names as part of the introduction to the Mass. Please note: some have come too late and so a sub has already been found. Please arrive early enough.

2. Sit with your family anywhere in the church. It might be most convenient to be toward the front half of the church, or at the edge of a row.

3. When the deacon is scheduled, he is automatically one of the communion ministers and the schedule has been adjusted for that. But if you are assigned, you will be one of the CMs, even if the deacon is present.

## DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

1. The guidelines in the new General Instruction on the Roman Missal call for the priest to place consecrated bread and wine in vessels himself, to receive communion before the extra Communion Ministers, and then to personally give each person the cup or plate they will be distributing from. These guidelines want it to be made clear that the ministers of communion are not priests nor are they the ordinary ministers of communion. **It has not been our experience that people are confused over who the priest is or that the extra communion ministers confuse or abuse their role**, so we will continue the procedures we

have become accustomed to. But please note: Different priests might do things differently and a priest is, of course, free to follow the Instruction literally, so the extra ministers of communion will have to be somewhat flexible.

2. Therefore, no matter who the priest is, the ministers of communion will come up around the altar area during the Greeting of Peace, after you have greeted those nearest you. It is best to finish your exchanges of peace, before approaching the altar. As the CMs approach, they make a bow toward the altar and then go up the steps/ramp and line up on either side behind the altar.

3. Two CMs bring to the altar the extra cups with purificators and distribution plates (ciboria), which are on the credence (serving) table on the choir-side. We need three ciboria and one cup (three cups at the 9:30 Mass or on special occasions). On rare occasions, they might not have been put on the table. In that case you can find some inside that choir-side credence table. Do **not** bring the ciborium from the tabernacle. The Church envisions communion to be from the bread consecrated at that Mass so as to emphasize the importance of what it is we are doing, when we celebrate Eucharist. The General Instruction on the Roman Missal puts it this way: "It is most desirable, just as the priest is bound to do so, that the faithful should receive the body of the Lord from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and should share the cup when it is permitted. Communion is thus a clearer sign of sharing in the sacrifice that is actually being celebrated."

4. Unless the presider does not want you to assist, please help distribute the communion from the plate/ciborium used during that Mass into the 3 extra ones until all 4 have approximately the same amount in them. If needed, fill the extra cup(s) with wine from the pitcher and then put the wine pitcher on the cruet table (or have the altar server do so).

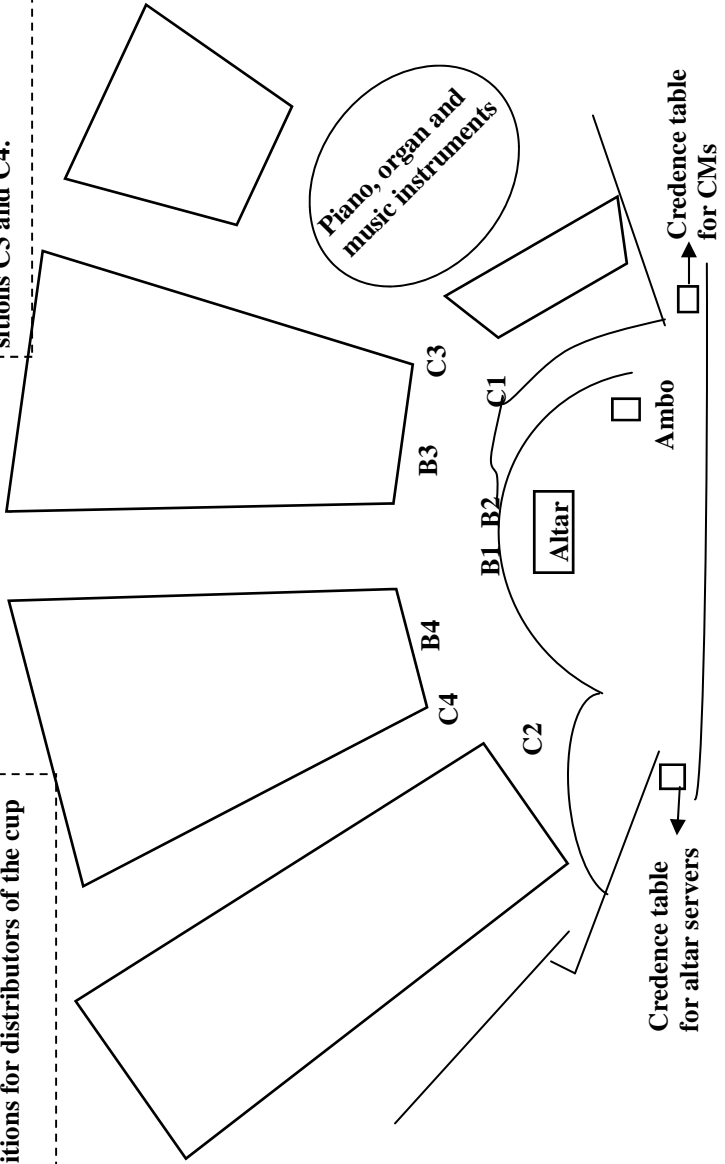
5. Depending on the presider, CMs might receive communion in slightly different ways. But in all cases, you do **not** consume your communion until after the presider has consumed his communion. When presented with communion (both the consecrated bread and wine), you are asked to **make a slight bow of the head** and then say 'Amen' as a sign of reverence and as an example to the rest of the community. The presider will then give the cup to two ministers. These two then become the ministers of the cup for all of communion. All then go to an open station (see diagram) and begin distributing communion to the assembly. Do **not** offer the cup to the altar servers at this time. Go directly to your stations. If the servers want to receive from the cup, they will go down the steps to receive. The point is to get communion flowing as soon as possible.

# COMMUNION STATIONS

**B=** positions for distributors of the consecrated bread.

**C=** positions for distributors of the cup

**NB:** It is only at the 9:30 a.m. Sunday Mass and special occasions that we use 4 cup distributors and need to use positions C3 and C4.



6. Communion Stations: The presider might go to any one of the stations. CMs need to pick an empty station and begin distributing. There are no pre-set stations, so you must be flexible in adapting to the situation. **If there are very elderly people or people with walkers/canes in the front rows, who have difficulty walking, please go right to them first and distribute communion.** Please allow sufficient space between the distributor of hosts and the cup so as not to cause back-up on the aisles.

7. When you offer the host or cup, say "The body (blood) of Christ," holding the host or cup out in front of the person. Remember: the focus is on an exchange of faith. Your saying "The body/blood of Christ" is your statement of faith on behalf of the whole community. You are asking for a response of faith ("Amen. Yes, I believe and will live it.") The focus is on the faith that must be present. If someone does not say "Amen," please say the "Amen" for them. Some say "receive the body of Christ." This is not appropriate because that puts the emphasis on the passive reception of communion. It is not so much that we are receiving the body of Christ, as it is that we believe this to be the body of Christ and are willing to become the body of Christ. We encourage people to make a slight bow of the head before stepping forward to receive so as not to minimize this important exchange of faith.

8. If the host drops, simply pick it up and consume it or set it aside in the plate and consume it at the end. If the consecrated wine spills, simply wipe it up with the purificator. If it is a large spill you may leave the purificator over the spill and, if need be, go to the choir-side credence table and get extra cloths.

9. If you are running low on the consecrated bread, check with the CMs nearest you and have them give you some of their extra hosts. Ordinarily you do not have to break any hosts in half. If doing so for a few allows you to finish communion, then that is acceptable. But first check with other CMs. If all CMs are running low, it might be necessary to go to the tabernacle to get some consecrated hosts. Do **not** do so without first checking all the other CMs, to see if they have sufficient extra hosts to finish the communion. Only if it looks like all will be out and breaking a few hosts will not suffice, do we then use the consecrated hosts in the tabernacle. We will always try to have the proper number of hosts available at each Mass. If you run out of the consecrated wine, simply go to the sacristy.

10. Ordinarily, the cantor and music ministers will all receive by coming to one of the communion stations. One of them might have a pyx so that an extra host can be reserved to distribute to the organist at the end of communion.

11. Often there are elderly or others who need communion but who do not come forward. Usually the ushers let you know how many. If so, transfer your hosts to another CM but keep the number you need for those who didn't come forward. Then, after giving them communion, you don't have to come back to the tabernacle. Ministers of the cup should then follow, so that the option to receive the cup is also offered to those who couldn't come forward.

12. If someone comes forward requesting communion to take with them, it should only be placed in a pyx, never a tissue or makeshift container. If they forgot their pyx, gently tell them to see the priest or pastoral minister after Mass and assure them that they will be given a proper pyx and the communion necessary. You don't repeat "the body of Christ" as you place the hosts in the pyx.

13. If a child comes forward who does not receive communion, you do not automatically bless them, so that such children don't feel "left out." The Mass has a blessing and it comes at the end, as we are dismissed. Rather, smile at the children or nod at them to acknowledge them. However, if someone comes up with their arms crossed, because that is how they've learned to get a blessing, go ahead and bless them. The pastor will address the issue in ongoing catechesis. Communion is not the time to try to teach them differently. Occasionally you will also get an adult who does that, because that is how some priest taught them. Again, bless them if they come up with arms crossed, even though that is not really the best practice for communion, but do not bless just because a child is with their older siblings or with an adult.

## CLEAN-UP

1. The General Instruction envisions that a priest, deacon or acolyte will first purify the plates and cups before giving them back to the CM for cleaning after Mass. It also allows, however, for them to be set aside until after Mass when both purifying and cleaning are then done. We will follow a modification of that second way.

2. Take the cups to the sacristy and consume (or have another CM or usher consume) the remaining contents. Put the cup on the counter, covered by the purificator. **Do not ever** pour the consecrated wine down the sacrarium (sink). Please do not clean the vessels at this time. The Mass captain, in conjunction with the priest, is responsible for cleaning the vessels after Mass.

3. Distributors of hosts should take the remaining consecrated bread to the tabernacle and place it in the ciborium there. Except for the CM who is taking communion to those in the back of church who are elderly/have difficulty walking, all other CMs should bring the remaining

consecrated hosts to the tabernacle area, rather than the main aisle. If the ciborium is full, simply place the bowl itself in the tabernacle. The first person at the tabernacle should remain there and do all the combining of hosts. The other CMs take the empty dishes to the sacristy immediately and place them on the counter. The one who puts the hosts in the ciborium genuflects or bows deeply, then shuts the tabernacle doors and goes back to their seat or sacristy. The focus at this time is not on the tabernacle or standing around waiting for the tabernacle doors to be shut. We have just distributed and received the greatest gift of all. The focus is to be on prayerful thanksgiving for the gift received and the commitment it will take us to live out that gift in a responsible manner. The tabernacle key can be left in the tabernacle door.

4. After Mass the Mass captain, in conjunction with the priest, cleans the dishes and cups. The plates can simply be dry-wiped over the sacristy sink. The cups are washed with hot water and soap (found under the sink). Dry the dishes, clean up the counter area and put the soiled linen in the hamper that is located in the server's closet.

## SUBSTITUTES

1. Our greatest challenge with the whole area of ministers of communion is faithful fulfillment of assignments. It is not fair to assume that someone will fill in if you don't show up. **If you cannot make it, get a substitute.**

2. You must first try to find a sub or switch with someone. If you cannot find a sub or switch, then call the captain of your assigned Mass. The captain is the name with an asterisk on the schedule. This will allow the captain to know beforehand how many people are needed and will be able to ask for help as people arrive.

3. If you are substituting for someone, let the Mass captain know the name of the person you are a substitute for.

4. Questions or concerns can be directed to Mary Ann Klakulak (586.781.9338). Schedules will be handed out in the sign-in room near the sacristy (Reconciliation Room) prior to the start of the new schedule. The schedule is also available online at [www.ssjohnandpaul.org](http://www.ssjohnandpaul.org). Please listen for the announcement and take a new schedule home. Any concerns about special schedules should be directed to Mary Ann, who will forward them to the scheduler. If you lose your phone list of CMs or your schedule, please call the parish office (586.781.9010) and we will send you a new one.

## MASS CAPTAINS

1. There is a captain assigned for each Mass. Ordinarily all ministers of communion will be assigned the role of 'captain' at one time or another, on a rotating basis.
2. The captain should arrive at least 15 minutes early. He or she will stand in the back and wait to make sure that all assigned extraordinary ministers of communion have arrived and signed in. Five minutes before Mass, if there is a need for more CMs, the captain will ask others to fill in. It is helpful when you let the Mass captain know before Mass, if you are available as an emergency sub.
3. If a captain will not be present at their assigned Mass, they are asked to call another CM for that Mass not just as a substitute but also to assume the role of the Mass captain.
4. Mass captains, in conjunction with the priest, will be responsible for cleaning up the dishes/cups after Mass in the sacristy.

## MISCELLANEOUS

1. The length of term for a CM is one year. There will be annual opportunities to review your commitment and to sign-up for another year. We deeply appreciate those who serve faithfully year after year. On the other hand, if your service has been irregular please be confident of improvement before signing up for another year.
2. Do you have to receive under both forms, if you are a CM? You are encouraged to, in order to witness to the full sign/symbol of eating and drinking. But there can be good reasons not to (e.g. having a cold). You have freedom to use your discretion.
3. What if someone wants to dip the host into the cup? The Church discourages this, since it tends to signal a person taking communion for himself/herself, rather than being offered communion as a gift. But please don't stop a person or make them feel bad about it. If it becomes common, then let Fr. Buersmeyer know.
4. Distributors of the cups: you need to let go of the cup after you offer it. If you hang onto the cup at the same time as the person attempts to receive it, then spills are more likely.
5. Thank you for your reverent and attentive care in performing this ministry. It helps all of us receive communion more reverently.

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