

**“Instruction: On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-ordained Faithful  
in the Sacred Ministry of Priests”**

*Application to Parishes & Institutions within the Catholic Diocese of Peoria*

With the advent of the above-mentioned document, issued by Eight Vatican Offices on November 13, 1997, the Church is asked to examine the distinctions between the ministries specific to the ordained clergy of the Roman Church and the ministries of lay people. “Liturgical actions must always clearly manifest the unity of the people of God as a structured communion...This happens when all participants, with faith and devotion, discharge those role proper to them.” (Article 6) In other words, each participant in the celebration of the Mass has his/her own particular and proper role to fulfill. Any blurring of these proper liturgical roles tends to confuse the celebration and to further erode the divinely established distinction between the Ministerial Priesthood and the Common Priesthood of the Faithful. Though there is a “great field of complementary activity” there is also “a more restricted area, namely, the sacred ministry of the clergy. In this ministry the lay faithful, men or women and non-ordained members of institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, are called to assist...” (Foreword)

The Second Vatican Council teaches that “...the hierarchy entrusts the laity with certain charges more closely connected with the duties of pastors: in the teaching of Christian doctrine, for example, in certain liturgical actions in the care of souls”<sup>1</sup>. *It must be remembered that collaboration with does not, in fact, mean substitution for. (Foreword)*

Concerning the practice of lay persons distributing Holy Communion to their fellow faithful as Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist, the Document places particular emphasis on several areas of practice, namely:

1. Extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are those instituted as acolytes and the faithful so deputed in accordance with Canon 230.3<sup>2</sup> These Extraordinary Ministers may distribute Holy Communion outside of liturgical celebrations on an individual or extended basis. This deputation is to be the province of the local Ordinary.
2. Extraordinary ministers may distribute Holy Communion at Eucharistic celebrations only when there are no ordained ministers present or when those ordained ministers present at a liturgical celebration are truly unable to distribute holy communion. They may also exercise this function at Eucharistic celebrations where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers to distribute Holy Communion.
3. It is useful for the diocesan bishop to issue particular norms concerning extraordinary ministers of Holy communion which, in complete harmony with the universal law of the church, should regulate the exercise of this function in his diocese. These norms are to include the instruction in eucharistic doctrine of those chosen to serve as Extraordinary Ministers; the rubrics to be observed, the reverence to be shown for the Sacrament and instruction concerning the discipline on admission to Holy Communion. Within these norms, the following are to be avoided and/or eliminated:
  - a. Extraordinary Ministers giving Communion to themselves or receiving Holy

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<sup>1</sup>Apostolicam Actuositatem, 24.

<sup>2</sup>When the necessity of the Church warrants it and when the ministers are lacking, lay persons, even if they are not lectors or acolytes, can also supply for certain of their offices, namely, to exercise the ministry of the word, to preside over liturgical prayers, to confer baptism, and to distributed Holy Communion in accord with the prescriptions of law.

- Communion apart from the other faithful as though they were concelebrants.
- b. Participation in the renewal of promises made by priests at the Chrism Mass or the use of that occasion for other categories of faithful to renew religious vows or receive, for the first time, a mandate as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
  - c. The habitual use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion at Mass, thus arbitrarily extending the concept of a great number of faithful.

Stemming from this Vatican Instruction, the following norms, both pre-existing and newly promulgated are in effect.

## THE NEED

There must be a definite need for the use of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist. Extraordinary Ministers are precisely that, extraordinary. The *ordinary* minister of the Eucharist is the bishop, priest, or deacon.<sup>3</sup>

When a Pastor is determining the need for Extraordinary Ministers, an *objective* need must be recognized. Three (3) basic items should be kept in mind:

1. The role of the EME is not to replace the ordained in the distribution of Holy Communion. This document recognized the necessity of EMEs distributing Holy Communion at heavily attended Masses where there is only one priest available. It would suggest, however, that in parishes with permanent deacons or additional clergy assigned or available, these ordained ministers would assume their proper roles. EMEs would be assigned accordingly.
2. "Extraordinary ministers may distribute holy Communion where there are particularly large numbers of the faithful and which would be excessively prolonged because of an insufficient number of ordained ministers"<sup>4</sup> or instituted acolytes to distribute the Sacrament.
  - a. "Excessive prolongation" ought to be defined as a period of time that is not out of proportion to the rest of the Mass. The distribution of the Sacrament is a significant element of the Mass and the faithful deserve the opportunity to offer proper devotion to God during a period of reflection and/or thanksgiving. An appropriate length of time might be gauged according to the length of the homily, the Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults, etc.
3. In parishes where Holy Communion is regularly received under both species, larger numbers of EMEs would be required. Again, the presence of additional priests, and certainly deacons, would affect the roster.

## SELECTION

Selection as an EME is a singular honor and privilege. Care must be taken that each candidate submitted to the Vicar General of the Diocese for commissioning:

1. Are Catholics in good standing;
2. Are chosen because of their obvious dedication to the Sacramental life of the Church; and
3. Enjoy a positive reputation within the local Community.

Extreme care should be taken to avoid politicizing the privilege or giving the appearance that such a mandate is a reward for past services to the parish.

General invitations to the Community for volunteers to this ministry is usually inappropriate.

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<sup>3</sup>Sacred Congregation for Discipline of Sacraments. *Immensae caritatis* (29 January 1973).

<sup>4</sup>Eight Vatican Offices. *Instruction: Some Questions Regarding Collaboration of Nonordained Faithful in Priests Sacred Ministry*, (November 27, 1997).

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

All candidates to serve as EMEs within the Diocese of Peoria are to follow the *Eucharistic Guidelines and Policies of the Diocese of Peoria*.<sup>5</sup> Within these promulgated guidelines are included:

1. Description of Person
2. Description of the Need
3. Description of the Formation suggested with Source Materials
4. After sufficient training, each candidate signs an *Affidavit of Candidate to Become an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion*. This/these affidavit(s) is then forwarded to the Office of the Vicar General, as Ordinary of Place, to receive the proper mandate.
5. The Rite of Commissioning Within or Outside of Mass
6. Discussion of Vesture
7. Other Considerations

The mandates for all EMEs will be in effect for 3 years. The mandates may be renewed by the Pastor for additional term. The Vicar General should be notified of the renewal.

Regularly scheduled retreat days for theological reflection upon the Holy Eucharist and periodic review of pertinent rubrics and local ceremonial are encouraged.

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<sup>5</sup>Office of Divine Worship, Diocese of Peoria. *Eucharistic Guidelines and Policies of the Diocese of Peoria*. (1 July 1987)

## LITURGICAL ROLES WITHIN MASS

Within the liturgy, each minister should perform all and only those parts which belong to them.<sup>6</sup> All local ceremonies should emphasize the separate characters of the ordained and non-ordained functionaries. This is accomplished through the placement of Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist outside of the Sanctuary, duties during the Communion Rite and appropriate reception of the Blessed Sacrament.

EMEs, by the very nature of the mandate, are lay persons. Any appearance that they are a type of 'concelebrant' is to be avoided. Therefore, they should be seated within the congregation during the celebration of the Mass. In describing the order of procession, the GIRM does not include the EMEs.<sup>7</sup> Further, "...at the celebration of Mass, it seems better that they do not enter in procession. They should sit among the people, so as to be seen to come up from the assembly for their ministry."<sup>8</sup> Such placement would not necessitate their participation in the entrance or recessional ceremonies.

An appropriate time for them to come forward to exercise their mandated ministry would be after the priests' Communion, but never before the *Lord's Prayer*. They may receive the Sacrament within the Sanctuary, but only after the ordained clergy participating in the Mass have done so, and before the Communion of the other Faithful assembled.

In the event that a parish would wish the EMEs to vest, care must be taken they the vesture not be clerical in appearance, though vested EMEs sitting in the congregation would be incongruous. Cassocks & surplices, albs or alb-like vesture should not be used. It is preferred that appropriate lay dress be worn. This does not include shorts, jeans or the like.

EMEs, as any layperson, are not to intinct the Host where it is the custom to receive under both species. Self-communication is allowed to concelebrating priests only.<sup>9</sup> Clergy present in the sanctuary attending Mass *in choro* and deacons of the Mass<sup>10</sup> do not self-communicate.

When the celebrant desire that Holy Communion be given under both species, the rite of Holy Communion under both kinds should be followed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Sacred Congregation for divine Worship. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*. #58. (27 March 1975)

<sup>7</sup>GIRM, op. cit. #82.

<sup>8</sup>Elliot, Peter J., "Ceremonies of the Modern Roman Rite. Ignatius Press, 1995, #780.

<sup>9</sup>National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *This Holy and Living Sacrifice: Directory for the Celebration and Reception of Communion under both Kinds*, (13 October 1984).

<sup>10</sup>Diocese of Peoria. *Celebration of the Eucharist with Deacon(s) Assisting*, (July 25, 1996), 9-d-1.

<sup>11</sup>GIRM, #244-245.

## PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK & HOMEBOUND

The tabernacle key is to be kept in a safe place, under lock & key itself. Since it is in the custody of the Pastor and assigned clergy, access to it should be limited.

It is most appropriate that EMEs who distribute Holy Communion to those unable to attend Mass (sick & shut-ins, residents of nursing/retirement homes, patients in hospitals) be sent out from a Sunday Mass or a weekday Mass. It follows from this ideal that EMEs receive Holy Communion at this particular Mass.

Since the bishop, priest or deacon is the ordinary minister of the Eucharist even outside of Mass<sup>15</sup>, barring unforeseen circumstances a priest or deacon should be present when approaching the tabernacle. Conversation should be kept to a minimum during the visit to the recipient as a sign of respect for the Blessed Sacrament.

The Rite of Communion Outside of Mass should be observed.<sup>16</sup>

The Eucharist for communion outside of a church is to be carried in a pyx or other covered vessel.<sup>17</sup> Should any particles of the Blessed Sacrament remain after distribution, it should be returned to the tabernacle. The proper purification of pyxes should also occur<sup>18</sup>, cleansing water used being consumed or poured into the sacrarium.

EMEs must be prepared to discharge their duties efficiently and properly. Hence, a "direct route" to their destinations must be observed. Personal errands and/or prolonged commiseration with the faithful are to be avoided. Communion calls and pastoral visitation to the sick are to be distinguished and kept separate.

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<sup>15</sup>Sacred Congregation of Rites. *Eucharisticum mysterium*, #33. (25 May 1967)

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, #26-41, 42-53, 54-67.

<sup>17</sup>Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. *Inaestimabile donum*, #13. (3 April 1980)

<sup>18</sup>GIRM, op. cit., #237-239.