

Communion to the Sick

Ministering Communion to the Sick or Homebound

The Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick:

- Is a representative of the praying community.
- Is entrusted with the safe and reverent transport of the Blessed Sacrament.
- Serves the suffering body of Christ.
- Brings Christ to the sick or homebound in the minister's own person.
- Makes the larger community aware of the sick person's needs.

The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the Eucharistic community. In bringing Communion to them, the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion represents Christ, and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at Mass. For the sick, the reception of Communion is not only a privilege, but also a sign of support and concern shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 73).

An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion who brings the Blessed Sacrament to a sick or

homebound person ministers to the body of Christ in many ways.

First, the minister is a representative of the praying community to someone who is unable to take his or her place within it. The minister carries not only the precious body and blood of Christ in the Eucharistic elements; she or he also carries the love, prayers, and concerns of the body of Christ — the Church — to one of its members.

Second, the minister is entrusted with the reverent and safe transport of the Blessed Sacrament.

Third, the minister serves the suffering body of Christ in the person

of the one to whom they bring Communion. Mother Teresa of Calcutta often said that she served the poor and suffering because she saw Christ in them. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion do well to see Christ in those to whom they minister.

Fourth, the minister brings Christ to the sick or homebound in the minister's own person, as well as in the Blessed Sacrament.

Finally, the ministers may bring back to the larger community the needs of the sick person. If the parish priest should be alerted to the spiritual or material needs of the sick person, the minister can make the need known.

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Preparations for a Visit

Ministering Communion to a sick person is much more than simply "delivering" the Blessed Sacrament. It is a time of prayer structured very much like the Mass, which means that both the minister and the communicant should prepare for the visit.

A minister may prepare for the visit in several ways. The best way is to participate in the Sunday Mass before the visit. In this way, you have an opportunity to pray for the person to be visited, to hear and reflect on the scriptures, and to receive the body and blood

of Christ.

If the visit cannot take place right after Sunday Mass, you should still take time to read and reflect on the scriptures, to pray for the one to be visited, to offer praise and thanks, and to ask God to work through you. See "Preparing," page 3.



The minister should try to celebrate the Communion service as fully as possible depending on the condition of the patient.

Diocesan Guidelines for Ministers to the Sick

The following is an excerpt from *Guidelines for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the Diocese of Richmond*:

33. Ordinarily each commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may take Communion to the sick. However, there may be certain specifically commissioned persons who are sent by the community to minister

to the sick of the parish on a regular basis.

Priests with pastoral responsibilities should see to it that the sick or aged, even though not seriously ill or in danger of death, are given every opportunity to receive the Eucharist frequently, even daily, especially during the Easter Season (*Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum* #72).

34. Ideally, ministers to the sick are sent by the parish

community each Sunday to take the Eucharist to those who are prevented from being present because of age or illness. This is usually done after the Prayer after Communion. The ministers may be blessed and ritually sent to extend the unity of the Eucharist with those who are sick. . .

Ministers may be sent ... at weekday Masses also.

"Each commissioned Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may take Communion to the sick."



Those who take Communion to the sick should have a pyx, a worthy container for the host.

The Communion Service

35. The minister to the sick may celebrate the Communion Service in one of two ways: a) in context of a liturgy of the Word; b) or in a brief form for use in more restrictive circumstances (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, chapter 3). It is recommended that whenever possible a group of sick or aged persons be brought together to celebrate the Liturgy of the Word and the Communion Service in a communal manner. If this is impossible, the minister should try to celebrate the Communion Service as fully as possible depending on the condition of the patient.

36. When the Eucharist is brought to the sick it should be carried in a pyx or small closed container. Ideally, a table is to be prepared with a cloth and a lighted candle for the Eucharist. A vessel of holy water may also be available.

37. If the sick person can only receive Eucharist under

the form of the Precious Blood, a container of consecrated wine may be brought from the Sunday or weekday celebration of the Eucharist. It is to be placed in a properly covered container and kept in the tabernacle until the minister is able to take it to the sick person. If any of the Precious Blood remains after the Communion Service, the minister is to consume what remains and properly purify the vessel.

38. Those who care for the sick or family members may also participate in the Communion Service and receive Communion even if they have already received Communion that day.

39. The pastor or priest-chaplain should see that worthy Eucharistic containers are available for use by Extraordinary Ministers to the sick and homebound. The Host is not to be carried in a handkerchief, envelope or similar unworthy container.

40. It is recommended that Hosts for the sick and home-

bound be consecrated in the Mass from which they will be taken and in which the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have participated. Hosts which cannot be distributed immediately and consumed at once by the sick and homebound should be consumed by the minister or returned to the tabernacle.

The Blessed Sacrament is not to be carried while the minister is carrying out other tasks, nor should it be taken or kept in the minister's home.

Viaticum

41. The norm for the reception of viaticum is within the context of the celebration of Mass with the dying person. However, when this is not possible due to circumstances and/or the condition of the dying person, a minister of Holy Communion may distribute viaticum outside of Mass (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, chapter 5).

Visiting the Sick

Here's some suggestions for visiting the sick, especially in hospitals:

- Do Not lean or sit on the bed.
- Do not offer the patient food or drink (a drink of water may be appropriate if water is at the bedside).
- Do not lift or assist the patient in moving.
- Limit your visit to an appropriate length of

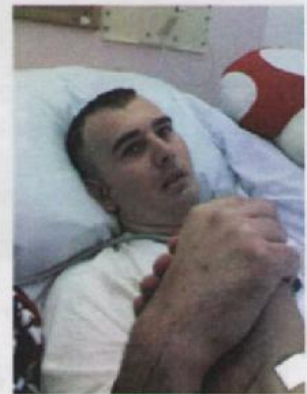
time.

- Avoid discussing cases similar to the patient.
- Encourage patients to talk about how they *feel* emotionally, rather than discussing how they look. Appearances are deceptive.
- Find the patient's emotional level and empathize.
- Do not impose your personal mood or ideas

on the patient.

- Do not judge the patient.
- **Listen!** Listen much more than you talk.
- After visiting, ask yourself, "Who knows more about whom?" Gather more information about the patient than he or she learns about you.
- Refer special needs to a nurse or chaplain.
- Visit only designated patients, floors, or areas assigned to you.
- Do not discuss patients with others in public areas.
- Hold all information in strict confidence
- Do not criticize the hospital or personnel.
- When in doubt, *ask!* Questions regarding hospital policies or procedures are appreciated.

- From *Visiting the Sick: A Guide for Parish Ministers* by Patti Normile (1992, St. Anthony Messenger Press).



Listen much more than you talk.

Preparing (Continued from pg. 1)

Be sure to review the rite of "Communion in Ordinary Circumstances" (a simple one page format is available with your materials), and walk through it in your mind. It is important that you are at ease with the rite, so that it can be celebrated well.

You will also want to have the scriptures of the day

available, perhaps in a resource such as *At Home with the Word*.

You'll also need a clean, white cloth (such as a linen napkin), a candle and candle holder (if oxygen is not in use), and matches or a lighter.



The Blessed Sacrament

The minister should obtain enough of the Blessed Sacrament for all those who are anticipated to receive Communion. This should be done just before the Communion visit. You should never carry the Blessed Sacrament while engaged in other activities or errands, or leave the

Blessed Sacrament unattended in your car or home. The parish is responsible for making sure that you have a pyx in which to transport the Blessed Sacrament properly. Some parishes have a dismissal of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion as the Communion Rite ends at Mass.

If the Communion visit will take place at another time, you will need to make arrangements to return to the church and obtain the Blessed Sacrament from the tabernacle. Be sure that you are aware of your parish procedures. Of course, you should always be aware of your demeanor as you

carry the Blessed Sacrament. Even as you're driving to the sick person's house or hospital, remember that you are transporting the Body of Christ, and act – and drive – like someone who is.



Helpful Reading

A Caregiver's Companion, J. Daniel Dymski (1977, Ave Maria Press)

Body, Mind, Spirit, R. Johnson, PhD. (1992, Liguori Publications)

Don't Sing Songs for a Heavy Heart, Kenneth Haugk (2004, Stephen Ministries)

Handbook for Ministers of Care, (1997, Liturgy Training Publications)

May Angels Lead You: Prayer Service for Those Near Death (1997, Liguori Publications)

Prayer and Quest for Healing, Barbara Fiand (1999, Crossroads Publishing)

Visiting the Sick: A Guide for Parish Ministers, Patti Normile (1992, St. Anthony Messenger Press)

Stephen Ministries Website: www.stephenministries.org. Go to "Grief Resources"

A Prayer of Preparation for One Taking Communion to the Sick

Bread of life, Jesus Christ,
you shed your blood to save us.
May your Spirit fill my heart,
that I may love as you do love
all those to whom I bring your Holy Communion today.
Amen.

More Hospital Considerations

- Wear identification if required by the hospital.
- Have pyx, prayer, scripture and other appropriate materials for the Communion rite.
- Make sure names and room number are correct for patient.
- Always check at nurse's station regarding any restrictions by mouth for patient.
- Always observe hand washing and other notices regarding sanitary procedures.
- Knock before entering and ask permission to enter.
- Announce your name, where you are from, and the purpose of your visit (e.g., "I'm Mary Smith from St. Joseph Church. I'm here to bring you Communion.").
- Ask for permission to stay
- Always be willing to leave room if the need arises (e.g., for a treatment), and wait outside if necessary.
- If family members are present speak to them, but focus on the patient. Feel free to include family in the prayer.
- Avoid theological discussions.
- Limit visit time, particularly if visitors are present.
- Administer the sacrament using the prescribed rite.
- Ask if there is anything the parish can provide before leaving.
- Leave appropriate materials (e.g., parish bulletin, prayer card, priest's commentary).
- If patient is not in room, check with the nurse to see if patient has been moved or discharged. If not., leave a note or card.
- Contact parish staff if any pastoral needs are identified.