Ministering the Body and Blood of Christ

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## What are ‘extraordinary’ ministers?

In this case ‘extraordinary’ has a technical meaning. It simply means ‘out of the ordinary’, rather than ‘great’ or ‘remarkable’. It is used to distinguish the ‘extraordinary’ minister from the ‘ordinary’ or ‘normal’ minister. The ‘ordinary’ ministers of Holy Communion are Bishops, priests and deacons. At Mass Holy Communion is made available to us from the elements over which the priest celebrant has offered the Thanksgiving. It is therefore important that the connection between our Communion and the Sacrifice of the Mass is made clear. One of the ways in which this is achieved is by Holy Communion being distributed by the priest celebrant. Other priests or deacons will assist the priest, if necessary. When there not enough other ‘ordinary’ ministers present, then the priest celebrant may be assisted by ‘extraordinary’ ministers. These will normally be ministers that, with the approval of the Cardinal, have been carefully chosen, prepared and commissioned to exercise this ministry in a particular parish or chaplaincy.

## When and why?

*During Mass*

* To assist with the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds
* When the size of the congregation is such that without their assistance the Communion Rite would be unduly long

*Outside of Mass*

* To minister Holy Communion to the sick and housebound
* To expose and repose the Blessed Sacrament
* To assist at a Celebration of Word and Holy Communion in the absence of the priest (when such celebrations have been authorised by the bishop) *NB this has not been authorised on Sundays*

# Ministering Holy Communion at Mass

A minister of Holy Communion is asked to do more than simply assist the faithful in receiving Holy Communion as food and drink. The reception of Holy Communion is a sacred action, an opportunity for encounter with Christ himself who offers himself to us under form of Bread and Wine.

But as in any relationship of love, his offering of himself has to be met by faith if a life-giving encounter and deep personal communion is to take place. *One Bread, One Body*, 53

The Lord himself offers us nourishment through the sacrament. But Ministers of Holy Communion have a great contribution to make in assisting the assembly to receive the sacrament fruitfully. They do this through the reverence they show for the Sacrament and for those to whom they minister it.

# Holy Communion under both kinds

The Church encourages that, whenever practical, Holy Communion should be distributed to the faithful under both kinds, that is under the forms of both Bread and Wine.

Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal Covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship between the Eucharistic banquet and the eschatological banquet in the Father’s Kingdom. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 281

When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, and a deacon is present he should always be one of the ministers of the chalice.

*Ministering the Host* The minister takes a host, raises it just a little and shows it, to the communicant saying: The Body of Christ. The communicant answers: **Amen**. Communion is then ministered. The minister should not make the sign of the Cross with the host before ministering Holy Communion. Those receiving the host are free to choose whether to receive in the hand or directly on the tongue.

*Ministering the Precious Blood* Standing before a communicant the minister raises the chalice just a little and shows it to the communicant, saying: The Blood of Christ. The communicant answers: **Amen**. The minister then hands the chalice to the communicant who then drinks from it, and returns the chalice to the minister. The minister then wipes the rim of the chalice with the purificator.

*Intinction* Ministering Holy Communion by intinction is not recommended in the Dioceses of England and Wales.

When individuals are unwilling to receive directly from the chalice, because of colds or other illness, they should be advised to receive Holy Communion under one kind for the duration of their illness.

## Blessings

Should people present themselves to a minister (ordained or lay) for a Blessing rather than for Holy Communion, then the Blessing should be ministered by laying a hand on the person’s head and saying words such as: *May the love of God be strong in your heart*. These words should not be accompanied by a sign of the cross.

## Practicalities in Royston

At most ‘normal’ Sunday Masses we would have five Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion: one taking a ciborium, the other four a chalice each.

The minister taking the Ciborium is asked to go to the Tabernacle and bring back the large Ciborium and the Pyx containing low-gluten hosts before Communion and to return them afterwards.

*This leaflet brings together material published by the Diocese. The full texts may be found at:* [*https://rcdow.org.uk/liturgy/resources-for-ministers-of-holy-communion/*](https://rcdow.org.uk/liturgy/resources-for-ministers-of-holy-communion/)