

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion Ministry to the Sick and Homebound

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHCs) who take Communion to the sick and homebound have a role in sharing the Church's total ministry to the sick after the manner of Jesus. In bringing Communion to the sick and homebound, the EMHC represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at Sunday Mass. This ministry is a sign of support and concern shown by the community for its members.

Patients who are in the hospital find it a comfort and source of healing to have Holy Communion brought to them as often as possible. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may make Communion visits any day of the week in accordance with the schedule and the protocol of each hospital or long-term residential facility.

The EMHC becomes a vital link between the parish community and the member who is sick or homebound. It is beneficial for visits to the sick and homebound to occur after Sunday Mass so that the link between the parish liturgical celebration and the parishioner is maintained. Taking a parish bulletin also helps maintain that link. The parish may also have a special blessing and dismissal for EMHCs after Communion; the assembly is sending them forth to do their ministry on the behalf of the whole parish community.

EMHCs do not replace the ministry of the priest to the people, but rather extend and expand it so that all will have more regular contact with Christ in Holy Communion.

EMHCs who minister to the sick and homebound should be empathic and compassionate. They should be sensitive to the sick and homebound person's needs including the spiritual, emotional, and material. They should always take care to maintain the confidentiality and dignity of the individual. They should also maintain contact with the pastor and/or parish pastoral care coordinator and inform them if the person is in need of sacramental anointing, the sacrament of reconciliation, or a pastoral visit. In addition, if EMHCs observe a particular physical or social need of a homebound person, they should bring this need to the attention of the pastoral care coordinator as well so that the parish may respond appropriately.

According to the ritual text Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass, "The Eucharist for Communion outside of 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". In the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, EMHCs dress in appropriate lay attire when bringing Communion to the sick or homebound. Consecrated hosts are usually taken from the EMHC's home parish or from the particular hospital's tabernacle. Follow the procedures of the parish or hospital.

If the sick/homebound person is well enough to participate in the full ritual, "Communion Under Ordinary Circumstances", use that ritual. If the person is not very well, use the shorter ritual "Communion in a Hospital or Institution". Both of these rituals are found in the rite, Pastoral Care of the Sick or in the smaller booklet, Communion of the Sick available from the Office of Worship.

EMHCs serving in hospitals or institutions should always be sure that they are giving Holy Communion to the correct person. If there are Catholic family members or Catholic staff

present, the EMHC should ask them if they would like to receive Holy Communion as well. When EMHCs have completed their assigned distribution, they should return any extra hosts to the hospital tabernacle or consume the hosts privately.

Extraordinary Ministers of Communion who are taking Holy Communion to the sick, homebound or to those in hospitals are to present the host in a prayerful manner. They are not to make judgments regarding the suitability of the person to receive the Holy Communion; such concerns are to be referred to the pastor or pastoral care coordinator.

Ordinarily, the parish pastoral care coordinator makes assignments and communicates assignments to the EMHCs and the sick and homebound.

Dos and Don'ts of Bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound

Do:

1. Make an appointment to visit. Ask how the person is feeling and if there will be others present so you will have sufficient hosts for all to receive. Also ask if they can prepare a table with a cloth, candle, cross or crucifix.
2. Use the ritual "Communion of the Sick" (*Chapter 3*) from Pastoral Care of the Sick and bring a Bible to read the scripture readings.
3. Begin informally. Introduce yourself to those who are present and briefly explain what you have come to do. Pay attention to how the sick/homebound person is feeling.
4. Invite those who are present to participate in the prayers. If they feel comfortable, enlist the help of family or friends to do the readings.
5. Based on the person's strength/attentiveness, share with them the day's homily.
6. Offer them the host, or a small piece of the host and have a cup of water handy if the person has difficulty swallowing.
7. Create links to the parish, e.g., bring a parish bulletin, share news from the parish, ask if there is anything the parish can do for them, if they need to see a priest for the sacrament of reconciliation or anointing of the sick.
8. Thank the person for the opportunity to pray with them and for their hospitality.

Don't:

1. *Don't* visit a sick person if you are not feeling well yourself. Find a substitute.
2. *Don't* stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
3. *Don't* compete with a television or radio. Politely ask if these can be turned off during the service.
4. *Don't* carry the consecrated host in a plastic bag, purse, pocket or other unsuitable container. Instead, use a pyx to carry the consecrated host.
5. *Don't* leave the consecrated host if the person cannot receive it. Instead, return at a later time to see the sick person. Consume any consecrated host or return it to tabernacle in the church or hospital chapel. *Don't* take hosts home or leave them in your car.