



The revised GIRM and the Ministry of Communion

A. What are the main points of the General Instruction concerning the Ministry of Communion?

1. The General Instruction emphasizes three important aspects of the Eucharist: the Sacrifice of the Cross that is perpetuated in the memorial of the Paschal Meal, the renewal of God's covenant that is renewed in the Communion of the Lord's Body and Blood and the pledge of the Eucharist as the Eschatological Banquet of God's Kingdom. (27, 72)
2. The Liturgy of the Eucharist is arranged in four parts corresponding to the four words and actions of Christ who, *took the bread and chalice* (Preparation of the Gifts), *gave Thanks* (Eucharistic Prayer), *broke the bread* (the Fraction Rite), and *gave it to them* (Communion Rite).
3. Since the Eucharistic Celebration is the Paschal Banquet of the Lord's Supper, it is desirable that in keeping with the Lord's command, his Body and Blood should be received as spiritual food by the Faithful who are properly disposed. (80)
4. The meaning of the sign demands that the matter used for the Eucharist have the appearance of food. Unleavened and baked in the traditional shape, the bread should be made in such a way that the Priest is able to break it into parts for distribution to at least some of the Faithful. The action of the breaking of bread, which gave its name to the Eucharist in apostolic times, brings out more clearly the force and importance of the sign of unity of all in the one bread, and of the sign of charity by the fact that the one bread is distributed among the brothers and sisters. (321)
5. It is most desirable that the Faithful receive the Lord's Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and, when it is permitted, partake of the Chalice (cf. no. 283), so that even by means of the signs Communion will stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated. (85)
6. Communion under both kinds is a fuller sign of the Paschal Meal, the Sacrifice Offering and the Eschatological Banquet. (281-287).
7. When Communion is given under both kinds, a chalice of a sufficiently large size or several chalices are prepared. (285) Sufficient wine is to be consecrated in chalice(s) but not in a flagon, nor is it permitted to pour the Precious Blood into chalices (RS 105-6).

B. How will the GIRM affect the Faithful when they receive Holy Communion?

1. Following the example of Christ who gave his Body and Blood to the Apostles at the Last Supper, Communion is received and not taken. Therefore, the Faithful are not permitted to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred Chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them from one to another. (160)
2. In the dioceses of Canada, the Faithful communicate standing. Before receiving Holy Communion, the Faithful should make a simple bow of the head. However, if they kneel, they should not be denied Holy Communion. (160)
3. When receiving Holy Communion on the tongue they reverently join their hands; when receiving Holy Communion in the hand, they reverently cross their hands one upon the other, and they consume the consecrated Host immediately upon receiving it. (160-161)

4. Uniformity of posture and action throughout the celebration, but especially at Communion, is a sign of unity of the Christian community gathered for the sacred Liturgy: it both expresses and fosters the intention and spiritual attitude of the participants. (41-42)
5. When the distribution of Communion is finished, the Priest and Faithful spend some time praying in silence. (88, 164).

B. What is the role of the extraordinary Minister of Communion in the General Instruction?

1. If there is a very large number of communicants and there are not enough Priests and Deacons to distribute Communion, the Priest Celebrant may be assisted by extraordinary Ministers, i.e., duly instituted Acolytes or even other Faithful who have been commissioned for this purpose. In case of necessity, the Priest may commission suitable Faithful for this single occasion. (162)
2. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal makes a distinction between a formally instituted Acolyte, which is a permanent ministry, and other ministers who serve the Priest or distribute Communion as an extraordinary Minister. A formally instituted Acolyte may assist the Priest as an extraordinary Minister in giving Communion to the people. In the absence of a Deacon the Acolyte may administer the Chalice. (187, 191)

C. How will the revised GIRM affect the extraordinary Ministers of Communion?

1. As usual, the extra-ordinary Ministers of Communion join in the Entrance Procession, and arriving at the Altar, they make a profound bow made to the Altar (49).
2. The extraordinary Ministers of Communion may sit in the sanctuary or in the body of the Church.
3. The extraordinary Ministers of Communion are no longer permitted to assist the Priest in breaking the Bread. (82)
4. The extra-ordinary Ministers of Communion do not stand at the Altar during Eucharistic Prayer; they come to the Altar only at the Communion of the Priest (162); and receive the sacred vessel from the Priest or Deacon. (162)
5. The extra-ordinary Ministers of Communion may not purify the sacred vessels. This is reserved to the Priest, Deacon or instituted Acolyte. (163, 279)
6. When they have finished the distribution of Communion, the extraordinary Ministers of Communion return the vessels of consecrated Bread and wine to the Priest or Deacon at the Altar. If fragments of the hosts adhere to the fingers, the Ministers of the consecrated Bread go to the side table to purify their fingers, then they return to their places. Since it is not explicitly forbidden, they may consume the Blood of the Christ remaining in the Chalice that they Ministered. (163, 278)

D. Some Finer Points for Ministers of Communion

1. Since their ministry is to assist the Priest and Deacon with the distribution of Holy Communion, there is no reason for them to stand at the Altar during the Celebration. They only come to the Altar to receive Communion before distributing it to the people, following the principle that one cannot give what one has not received. This directive does not prohibit the Ministers from taking their places in the sanctuary for the celebration, or moving to the sanctuary during the Sign of Peace. In this way they are ready to approach the Altar and receive Communion themselves so as not to delay unduly the Communion of the Faithful. (See 162)
2. When giving Communion the Minister raises the Host or Chalice slightly elevated before the communicant and says “The Body of Christ” or “The Blood of Christ.” No other actions or words are added. (116)
3. Provision should be made in order that the Musicians may receive Communion conveniently. (86)

E. Further resources

A sample set of guidelines for extraordinary Ministers of Communion and other resources may be found at the Archdiocesan website (see Liturgy and Roman Missal).