

GUIDELINES FOR

Lectors, Readers, Acolytes, Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion





ISSUED BY THE DIOCESE OF WOLLONGONG
7TH EDITION, 2024

This seventh edition incorporates the ministries of Instituted Lector and Reader.

The sixth edition is updated to reflect Pope Francis' apostolic letter, *Spiritus Domini*, updating the role of Instituted Acolytes.

The fifth edition, issued by Bishop Brian Mascord in 2019 clarified the roles of Acolyte and Adult Altar Server in relation to Junior Altar Servers.

The fourth edition issued by Bishop Brian Mascord, reflects the norms and current practices within the Diocese of Wollongong with regard to Adult Altar Servers.

The third edition (2015) added details of the requirements for written authorisation of service periods through the use of Minister Engagement Forms, including details of current Working With Children's Check Clearances for Acolytes and Adult Altar Servers, and current National Police History Check Clearances for those who take Holy Communion to the Sick and Home-bound.

The second edition (2013) included revisions based on the publication of the official English translation of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2010) as well as recent policy updates made by the Diocesan Liturgical Commission in 2012 to raise the profile and further emphasise the importance of formation, training and commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.

For further information or to order extra copies contact the Liturgy Office – Diocese of Wollongong
02 4222 2462 • liturgy@dow.org.au

Contents

4	Foreword
5	Historical Background
6	The Complementarity of Ministries
7	Lectors
7	The Role of Instituted Lectors
8	Formation and Training of Lectors
9	Readers
9	Role
9	Deputing and Blessing of Readers
9	Formation and training of readers
10	Acolytes
10	The Role of Instituted Acolytes
11	Formation and Training of Acolytes
12	Adult Altar Servers
12	Role
12	Commissioning of Adult Altar Servers
12	Formation and Training of Adult Altar Servers
13	Junior Altar Servers
14	Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
14	Role
14	Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
15	Formation and Training of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
15	Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in the School Environment
15	Extraordinary Ministers Taking Holy Communion to the Sick and Elderly
16	Communion of the Sick and Home-bound
20	Order of Communion Rite
21	Appendix A
21	The Role of the Acolyte and Adult Altar Server at Mass
23	Appendix B
23	The Role of the Lector and Reader at Mass

Foreword



The Diocesan Liturgical Commission has drafted these guidelines according to the Church's teachings on the Mystery of Faith we receive and adore in the Eucharist. It is my hope that we can, through

the use of these guidelines, promote a common understanding of the reverence and respect required by all who minister in various ways as we celebrate the Eucharistic mysteries.

Every parish community is unique and this needs to be taken into consideration as liturgy is prepared. However, these guidelines give us a common ground to stand on based on a common understanding of liturgical law and good liturgical practice while underscoring the expectations of the universal Church and the local Church of the Diocese (General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], 107).

I hope these guidelines will assist all, clergy and lay liturgical ministers, who so generously give of themselves to foster liturgy; that they will nourish the full, active and conscious participation of all who participate in the Sacred Liturgy of the Church.

I authorise these guidelines for use in the Diocese of Wollongong.

+ Brian Mascord

Most Rev Brian G Mascord DD
Bishop of Wollongong

Given at Wollongong on the
Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

21 November 2024



"Christ the Lord has left to the Church, his spouse, a testament of his immense love. This wonderful gift of the Eucharist, which is the greatest gift of all, demands that such an important mystery should be increasingly better known and its saving power more fully shared. With the intention of fostering devotion to the Eucharist – the summit and centre of Christian worship – the Church, moved by pastoral zeal and concern, has on more than one occasion issued suitable laws and appropriate documents" (*Pope Paul VI, Immensae Caritatis, 25 January 1973*).

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Historical Background

Early in 1972 two decisions made in Rome had a profound effect on what had happened until then in the distribution of Holy Communion.

On 1 January 1972 the Church implemented Pope Paul VI's decree of 15 August 1971 that the ministries of Acolyte and Lector would now be available to lay people.

One of the roles for Acolytes would be to assist with the distribution of Holy Communion. A year later, on 25 January 1973, the Church issued the faculty by which lay people could assist with the distribution of Communion.

In July 1992 Pope John Paul II confirmed a Vatican clarification that the 1983 Code of Canon Law allows both males and females to assist at serving Mass.

On 10 January 2021 Pope Francis opened the roles of lector and acolyte to women.

It was Pope Paul VI who, in the wake of Vatican II, recognised that they stemmed from the priesthood of the faithful as a result of having been baptised, that they were ministries that belonged to the baptised and so to the laity.

This Guideline, authorised by Bishop Brian Mascord, confirms the application of these various clarifications in the Diocese of Wollongong.



The Complementarity of Ministries

The call to liturgical ministry within the celebration of the Eucharist is based in Baptism and the royal priesthood of the faithful. As selfless, mature service, it requires proper disposition, ongoing formation and continual conversion. Liturgical service enriches faith and impels us to a deeper commitment to the Christian life. Good liturgical practice enriches faith for all present; poor practice can be a stumbling block for growth in faith.

Each ministry group - acolytes, readers, Eucharistic ministers, servers, commentators, cantors, musicians, sacristans, ushers, collectors - will need periodic education on how their respective roles complement each other and highlight the ministerial priesthood proper to a Bishop and a priest, *“who offer the Sacrifice in the person of Christ and who preside over the gathering of the holy people”* (GIRM #4).

It is liturgically inappropriate, for example, in normal circumstances for altar ministers to assume other roles such as reading, commenting, or leading music.

Because each ministry’s role is to contribute to the overall prayerful experience of the community, the number of persons around the altar needs to be adequate but not superfluous.

The prime characteristic of all that surrounds liturgical celebration is *“noble simplicity”* (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 34).

The roles and tasks of those who serve within the liturgy are guided by and arise from this characteristic. At all times during the Liturgy of the Eucharist the focus is the Eucharistic action and care is taken to avoid any gesture or movement that draws attention to oneself and distracts the Assembly from this focus.

This will be achieved firstly by the proper initial training of all persons in their respective roles, and secondly, by their ongoing formation in liturgy.

FORMATION AND TRAINING OF ACOLYTES, ADULT SERVERS AND EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

The term “training” refers to the process whereby people gain the knowledge they need to carry out their roles with confidence and understanding.

“Formation” refers to wider education and other assistance given from time to time to help people mature in the understanding of their ministry and role. Formation may include courses on liturgy, or some specific liturgical rite, retreats and spiritual enrichment days.

Ongoing formation of Lectors Readers Acolytes, Adult Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion involves more than knowing the rubrics. Ministers need to have an understanding of the spirit of the liturgy and to continually renew this understanding.

“For this people is the People of God, purchased by Christ’s Blood, gathered together by the Lord, nourished by his Word. . . . This people, though holy in its origin, nevertheless grows constantly in holiness by conscious, active, and fruitful participation in the mystery of the Eucharist” (GIRM #5).

“Liturgical ministry within the Eucharistic celebration is a call to participate in a special way in this marvellous mystery: the dying of Jesus, his rising and coming again. Those to whom the church entrusts this sacred ministry, are called to a most “important office of immense love” (Pope Paul VI, *Immensae Caritatis*, 25 January 1973).

Lectors

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTED LECTORS

- a. The Lector is instituted to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture (GIRM #99), including the training, and, to the extent needed, coordination of readers.
- b. The Lector may also announce the intentions for the Universal Prayer and, in the absence of a psalmist, recite the Psalm between the readings.
- c. The Lector has the role of directing the singing and the participation by the faithful.
- d. The role of the Lector during the celebration of Mass is outlined in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM #194-198). Practical interpretation of these for this Diocese is given in Appendix B.

And, may include, to the extent needed:

- Training and formation of readers.
- Providing formation on the Word, including scripture groups and Lenten groups.
- Leading Lectio Divina.
- Leading Liturgy of the Word and Prayer of the Church.
- Preaching in the Liturgy of the Word.
- Preparing the Universal Prayer.
- Instructing the faithful for the worthy reception of the sacraments.
- Preparing or leading parents presenting children for baptism.
- Coordinating or leading Children's Liturgy of the Word.
- Coordinating or leading sacramental preparation of adults, including breaking open the Scriptures with Catechumens after Dismissal.
- Coordinating or leading sacramental preparation of children.

Five Year Faculty of Service

- a. While Instituted ministry of Lector is permanent, in the Diocese of Wollongong, permission to regularly exercise the ministry is at the discretion of the Bishop and is granted for a maximum period of five years, following which the Lector may apply for a further period of service. These periods of service are recorded in the lector's Minister Engagement Form.
- b. The Bishop reserves the right to withdraw the faculty of service at any time.
- c. The Lector's faculty of service permits them to serve anywhere within the territory of the Diocese of Wollongong, but always and only at the invitation of the Priest in charge of the church or chapel.
- d. A Lector taking up permanent residence outside the Diocese of Wollongong automatically surrenders their faculty to exercise their ministry within the Diocese and they are requested to notify the Diocesan Liturgy Office of their departure.
- e. A Lector from another Diocese, taking up permanent residence and service in the Wollongong Diocese, is asked to notify the Diocesan Liturgy Office of the date and place of institution and other details so that a Five-Year Faculty of Service can be issued.
- f. Any Lector wishing not to continue in the active ministry before the conclusion of five years is expected simply to notify their Parish Priest and the Diocesan Liturgy Office of the fact.

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FORMATION AND TRAINING OF LECTORS

Lector formation and training takes place at both Parish and Diocesan level.

The Diocesan Liturgy Office will conduct:

- a. The Diocesan course for Instituted Lectors. This course involves a number of sessions covering the theological liturgical and practical aspects of the instituted ministry of Lector.
- b. The Diocesan course for Lectors and Readers. This provides general training in the liturgical and practical aspects of ministry.
- c. Regional gatherings in association with other liturgical ministries to provide enrichment in their understanding of the liturgy.

The Parish is expected to provide:

- a. Ongoing formation in scripture, theology and the principles of liturgy - especially where it has not been possible for candidates to attend the Diocesan course. In this case, the Parish undertakes to conduct a course with content similar to the Diocesan course.
- b. Practical training in parish ministry based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.
- c. Opportunities for personal reflection and deeper appreciation of their ministry. This may well take place in conjunction with Lectors and Readers from neighbouring parishes.

“The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that a richer share in God’s Word may be provided for the faithful” (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 51).

“For in the readings God speaks to his people ...offering them spiritual nourishment; and Christ himself is present through his Word in the midst of the faithful ” (GIRM, 55)

“Now Lord ... grant to your servants to speak your Word with all boldness while you stretch out your hand to heal ...” (Acts 4:29).

“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Colossians 3:16).

“Lectors are to make every effort and employ all suitable means to acquire that increasingly warm and living love and knowledge of Scripture that will make them more perfect disciples of the Lord” (Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972, #5).

Readers

ROLE

- a. Readers are lay ministers deputed to proclaim the readings from Sacred Scripture, people who are truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for Sacred Scripture (GIRM #101).
- b. In the Diocese of Wollongong, a Reader may carry out all the duties of a Lector in the function of serving the Word (GIRM #99, #101, #194-198).
- c. Readers respond to the prayers and dialogues along with the congregation. They also join in the singing of the hymns.

DEPUTING AND BLESSING OF READERS

- a. The Parish Priest commissions Adult Altar Servers at a Sunday Mass after prerequisites of formation have been met (see Book of Blessings, p 783).
- b. Readers are required to be persons of sound character who are in full communion with the Catholic Church.
- c. A Reader applies to his or her Parish Priest or is invited to participate in this lay liturgical ministry by the Parish Priest.
- d. The Parish Priest approves each period of service. These periods of service are recorded in the reader's Minister Engagement Form.
- e. Intending candidates are invited to attend the Diocesan course for Lectors and Readers, or to participate in a similar course conducted within their Parish.

FORMATION AND TRAINING OF READERS

Formation of Readers will take place at both Diocesan and Parish levels.

The Diocesan Liturgy Office will conduct:

- a. The Diocesan course for Lectors and Readers. This provides general training in the liturgical and practical aspects of ministry.
- b. Regional gatherings in association with other liturgical ministries to provide enrichment in their understanding of the liturgy.

The Parish is expected to provide:

- a. Ongoing formation in scripture, theology and the principles of liturgy - especially where it has not been possible for candidates to attend the Diocesan course. In this case, the Parish undertakes to conduct a course with content similar to the Diocesan course.
- b. Practical training based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.
- c. Opportunities for personal reflection and deeper appreciation of their ministry. This may well take place in conjunction with Acolytes and Adult Altar Servers from neighbouring parishes.

Acolytes

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTED ACOLYTES

- a. The Acolyte is instituted for service at the altar and to assist the Priest and Deacon (GIRM #98), including the training, and, to the extent needed, coordination of Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Communion.
- b. The Acolyte has a particular role in preparing the altar and the sacred vessels. In the absence of an Acolyte, an Adult Altar Server takes this role.
- c. The role of the Acolyte during the celebration of Mass is outlined in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM #187-193). Practical interpretation of these for this Diocese is given in Appendix A.
- d. The Priest stands at the altar leading the Eucharistic Prayer. To preserve this presidential role no one (except other concelebrants or a Deacon) stands beside the Priest at the altar. Nor does the Acolyte sit at the side of the Priest. The Priest's chair symbolises his unique presidential role and is shared only by Deacons if available.
- e. An Acolyte may act as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion (GIRM #98).

And, may include, to the extent needed:

- Training and formation of lay communion ministers.
- Organising ministers for bringing communion to the sick in their homes or in hospitals and nursing homes.
- Training and coordinating altar servers including junior altar services.
- Leading Liturgy of the Word or Sunday Services in the absence of a priest forming the community in eucharistic living taking the role of MC at major parish liturgies.
- Taking the role of sacristan in preparing the altar, preparing the thurible when incense is used.

- Preparing children for First Communion.
- Being a member of the baptismal preparation team preparing parents for the baptism of their children.

Five Year Faculty of Service

- a. While Instituted ministry of Acolyte is permanent, in the Diocese of Wollongong, permission to regularly exercise the ministry is at the discretion of the Bishop and is granted for a maximum period of five years, following which the Acolyte may apply for a further period of service. These periods of service are recorded in the acolyte's Minister Engagement Form.
- b. The Bishop reserves the right to withdraw the faculty of service at any time.
- c. The Acolyte's faculty of service permits them to serve anywhere within the territory of the Diocese of Wollongong, but always and only at the invitation of the Priest in charge of the church or chapel.
- d. Acolytes taking up permanent residence outside the Diocese of Wollongong automatically surrenders their faculty to exercise their ministry within the Diocese and are requested to notify the Diocesan Liturgy Office of their departure.
- e. An Acolyte taking up permanent residence outside the Diocese of Wollongong automatically surrenders his faculty to exercise his ministry within the Diocese and he is requested to notify the Diocesan Liturgy Office of his departure.
- f. An Acolyte from another Diocese, taking up permanent residence and service in the Wollongong Diocese, is asked to notify the Diocesan Liturgy Office of the date and place of institution and other details so that a Five-Year Faculty of Service can be issued.
- g. Any Acolyte wishing not to continue in the active ministry before the conclusion of five years is expected simply to notify their Parish Priest and the Diocesan Liturgy Office of the fact.

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FORMATION AND TRAINING OF ACOLYTES

Acolyte formation and training takes place at both Parish and Diocesan level.

The Diocesan Liturgy Office will conduct:

- a. The Diocesan course for Instituted Acolytes. This course involves a number of sessions covering the theological liturgical and practical aspects of the instituted ministry of Acolyte.
- b. The Diocesan course for Acolytes, Adult Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. This provides general formation in the liturgical and practical aspects of ministry.
- c. Regional gatherings in association with other liturgical ministries to provide enrichment in their understanding of the liturgy.

The Parish is expected to provide:

- a. Ongoing formation in scripture, theology and the principles of liturgy - especially where it has not been possible for candidates to attend the Diocesan course. In this case, the Parish undertakes to conduct a course with content similar to the Diocesan course.
- b. Practical training based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.
- c. Opportunities for personal reflection and deeper appreciation of their ministry. This may well take place in conjunction with Acolytes and Adult Altar Servers from neighbouring parishes.

“Those who serve at the altar exercise a genuine liturgical function. They ought to discharge their office therefore, with the sincere devotion and decorum demanded by so exalted a ministry and rightly expected of them by God’s people. Consequently, they must all be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, in the measure proper to each one, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner” (Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 29).

“Lay people who are pledged to the special service of the Church, whether permanently or for a time, have a duty to acquire the appropriate formation which their role demands, so they may conscientiously, earnestly and diligently fulfil their role” (Code of Canon Law, 231§1).

“Since an Acolyte is especially destined for the service of the altar, he should familiarise himself with everything which pertains to divine worship and should endeavour to understand its spirit and its inner meaning” (Pope Paul VI, *Ministeria Quaedam*, 15 August 1972, #6).

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Adult Altar Servers

ROLE

- a. An Adult Altar Server is a lay minister commissioned to serve at the altar and assist the Priest and Deacon in a similar way to the Acolyte (GIRM #100).
- b. In the Diocese of Wollongong, an Adult Altar Server may carry the cross, the candles, the censor (thurible), the bread, the wine, and the water and carry out all the duties of an Acolyte in the function of serving the Priest at the altar (GIRM #100, #107, #187-193).
- c. The Adult Altar Server may act as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion if he or she has been authorised by the Bishop for this role, or if the Priest deposes the Adult Server for a particular occasion (GIRM #162).
- d. Adult Altar Servers respond to the prayers and dialogues along with the congregation. They also join in the singing of the hymns.

COMMISSIONING OF ADULT ALTAR SERVERS

- a. The Parish Priest commissions Adult Altar Servers at a Sunday Mass after prerequisites of formation have been met (see Book of Blessings, p 783).
- b. Adult Altar Servers are required to be at least 16 years of age. Those over 18 years must have a current Working With Children Check Clearance.
- c. An Adult Altar Server applies to his or her Parish Priest or is invited to participate in this lay liturgical ministry by the Parish Priest.
- d. The Parish Priest approves each period of service, normally five years duration consistent with the duration of the Working With Children Check. These periods of service are recorded in the adult altar server's Minister Engagement Form.

- e. Intending candidates are invited to attend the Diocesan course for Acolytes, Adult Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, or to participate in a similar course conducted within their Parish.
- f. The Adult Altar Server may offer his or her service anywhere within the territory of the Diocese of Wollongong, but always and only at the invitation of the Priest in charge of the church or chapel.

FORMATION AND TRAINING OF ADULT ALTAR SERVERS

Formation of men and women Adult Altar Servers will take place at both Diocesan and Parish levels.

The Diocesan Liturgy Office will conduct:

- a. The Diocesan course for Acolytes, Adult Altar Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
- b. Regional gatherings in association with other liturgical ministries to provide enrichment in their understanding of the liturgy.

The Parish is expected to provide:

- a. Ongoing formation in scripture, theology and the principles of liturgy - especially where it has not been possible for candidates to attend the Diocesan course. In this case, the Parish undertakes to conduct a course with content similar to the Diocesan course.
- b. Practical training based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal.
- c. Opportunities for personal reflection and deeper appreciation of their ministry. This may well take place in conjunction with Acolytes and Adult Altar Servers from neighbouring parishes.

Junior Altar Servers

- a. The Junior Altar Servers' special ministry is to serve in the sanctuary, in areas pertaining to the altar and lectern.
- b. Under the direction of an Acolyte or Adult Altar Server, they assist with the smooth flow of the liturgical rite, enhancing the spirit of worship and prayer.
- c. Junior Altar Servers need to be mature enough to understand their responsibilities and to carry them out with appropriate reverence. They should have already received Holy Communion for the first time.
- d. Junior Altar Servers respond to the prayers and dialogues along with the congregation. They also join in the singing of the hymns.
- e. For young people, their time of altar service may play an important part in their personal spiritual growth. It is considered to be a laudable practice for parishes to encourage both boys and girls in this form of service.
- f. Servers are seated in a suitable place on the sanctuary. The place next to the Priest is normally reserved for the Deacon.
- g. Junior Altar Servers play a very visible part in parish liturgy. Their training and formation programs take place at parish level. The formation of Junior Servers should include instruction on the Mass and its parts and their meaning. Servers need appropriate guidance on maintaining proper decorum and attire when serving Mass and other liturgies.
- h. In keeping with the special dignity of this ministry of service within the sanctuary, opportunities for continuing education and reflection are offered.
- i. The proper training of Servers, especially the young, is most important and is ideally the responsibility of one or two people in the parish so that uniformity and consistency can be maintained throughout the group.
- j. The Order for Blessing of Altar Servers may be used before altar servers first begin to function in this ministry (Book of Blessings p 783).



Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

The Ordinary Minister of Holy Communion is the Bishop, Priest or Deacon. Those who assist the ordained are called "Extraordinary" Ministers of Holy Communion. (c.f. GIRM #162).

ROLE

- a. This ministry involves men and women in giving Communion to the Assembly. It may also involve taking Communion to the sick and elderly (*Immensae Caritatis*, 1).
- b. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion do not normally participate in the entrance procession or go to the tabernacle during the Eucharist, unless they are also undertaking the role of Adult Altar Server.
- c. The ministers approach the altar after the Priest has received Communion (GIRM #162). In some parishes it may be advisable to gather in a suitable place after the Lamb of God, in order to approach the altar in an orderly fashion.
- d. After receiving Communion, they receive the vessel containing the Eucharistic species from the priest and move to their position for the distribution of the Body or Blood of the Lord.
- e. After distribution of Communion, the ministers take the vessels to the place designated and then move to their seats according to local custom, thus presenting a minimum of distraction during the post-Communion reflection.
- f. Ministers show the greatest reverence for the Holy Eucharist by their demeanour, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread and wine.

COMMISSIONING OF EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Three Year Faculty of Service

- a. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are authorised by the Bishop and usually commissioned by the Parish Priest within a Parish Sunday Mass. They are commissioned according to *"The Order for the Commissioning of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion"* (Book of Blessings, p 795, or The Rites, Part II, p 142). The Certificate of Commissioning, including the Bishop's authorisation, is normally provided at the commissioning ceremony.
- b. In the parish setting, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (including "Ad Hoc" Ministers) should be at least 16 years of age.
- c. The criteria of *"Immensae Caritatis"* are to be observed in the selection of candidates:

"The faithful who are extraordinary ministers of communion must be persons whose good qualities of Christian life, faith, and morals recommend them. Let them strive to be worthy of this great office, foster their own devotion to the Eucharist and show an example to the rest of the faithful by their own devotion and reverence toward the most august sacrament of the altar. No one is to be chosen whose appointment the faithful might find disquieting" (*Immensae Caritatis*, Part I:vi).
- d. The recommended occasion for induction is the Solemn Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ. The ceremony takes place after the Gospel during the Sunday Eucharist.

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- e. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are commissioned for a three-year period, recorded in their Minister Engagement Form. At the end of this time, the situation of the minister, local circumstances and the discretion of the Parish Priest will determine whether new or additional candidates are required, and whether existing ministers will be asked to step down.
- f. Ad hoc Ministers of Holy Communion may be deputed by priests when Acolytes or commissioned Extraordinary Ministers are unavailable, using the following or similar words:

Priest:

Merciful God, creator and guide of your family, bless our brothers/sisters who have been chosen to give the Bread of Life to your people on this special occasion. May the saving mysteries they distribute lead them to the joys of eternal life.

OR

May the Lord bless you as you minister the Body of Christ to God’s faithful people.

FORMATION AND TRAINING OF EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION

Formation and training of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion takes place at both Parish and Diocesan level. A sufficient pastoral, spiritual, theological and practical preparation is needed to fulfil the role with knowledge and reverence.

The Diocesan Liturgy Office will conduct:

The introductory course for Acolytes, Adult Servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, and the introductory course for Ministry to the Sick and Dying.

The Parish is expected to provide:

Practical training based on the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the Pastoral Care of the Sick.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

In Masses which take place within the school environment, those who are designated Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion in their own parishes may exercise the ministry. This may include students in the school community who participate in the ministry in their home parish.

On the occasion of there not being any Extraordinary Ministers who minister in their local parish, “Ad Hoc” Ministers may be commissioned with a blessing. They need to be at least 16 years of age and would be selected after consultation with the Parish Priest or school chaplain.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS TAKING HOLY COMMUNION TO THE SICK AND ELDERLY

Acolytes and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who have a current National Police Check Clearance may be appointed by the Parish Priest to take Communion to the sick and homebound when there is pastoral need. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission offers additional formation and training for this important pastoral ministry of Communion of the Sick and Homebound.

Communion of the Sick and Home-bound

Communion of the Sick and Sunday Mass

Sunday is an ideal day for Communion to the sick since every Sunday is a “little Easter” commemorating the resurrection of Jesus. It is the day of the week when God calls his people together to worship “in spirit and in truth”.

To establish clearly the link between Communion of the Sick and the Sunday Eucharist of the community, the Extraordinary Minister will ordinarily take the Eucharist from Sunday Mass. Such ministers will normally be commissioned in the midst of the Eucharistic assembly after the Prayer after Communion using the following or similar formula:

Priest:

Dear friends in Christ,

You are now to carry the Body of the Lord from this Eucharistic assembly to our brothers and sisters who are unable to be here with us.

Give them our greetings, read today's Scriptures with them, pray with them and minister to them this most precious sacrament.

The priest then hands the pyxes to the Communion Ministers. After the final blessing and dismissal they may process out with the celebrant and proceed to their destinations.

The Journey

The following practical guidelines are suggested as ways to show reverence to the Blessed Sacrament:

“The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the eucharistic community. In bringing Communion to them the minister of Communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, 73*)

“The obligation to visit and comfort those who cannot take part in the Eucharistic Assembly may be clearly demonstrated by taking Communion to them from the community's Eucharistic celebration. This symbol of unity between the community and its sick members has the deepest significance on the Lord's Day, the special day of the Eucharistic Assembly” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, 73*).

- a. The minister carries the consecrated host(s) in a pyx.
- b. “The Communion Minister should wear attire appropriate to this ministry” (*Pastoral Care of the Sick, 72*).
- c. When carrying the Blessed Sacrament to the sick the minister will endeavour to be aware of the presence of the Lord and to remain in prayer with Him. While being courteous to people who are met along the way, the minister will not engage in unnecessary conversation.

continued on next page ▶

- d. The minister carrying the Body of Christ ordinarily goes to the sick person without unnecessary digression, e.g. It is not appropriate to do shopping on the way. However, the minister may prefer to take the family home in the car first, unless the family is to be involved in visiting the sick. The passengers in the car may join in praying some common prayers or listening to reflective music.
- e. The minister may wish to take another parishioner or family member on the visit and this is a laudable practice.
- f. To reinforce the connection with the parish community, and where the sick or elderly person is well enough, it is recommended that the Parish bulletin and *Journey* magazine be taken to the person. Alternatively, the Eucharistic Minister may share the news of the Parish after the Rite of Communion is completed.
- g. In arranging the time of the visit, the minister may encourage other members of the family to be present.

The Visit

- a. Upon entering the room the minister greets the sick person and others present in a warm, friendly manner. It may be appropriate to chat for a few minutes before beginning the prayer. If you are a personal friend and are likely to have a lengthy and animated visit, it may be most appropriate to pray and minister communion early in the visit so that the presence of the Blessed Sacrament is not forgotten.
- b. When the time comes to begin the prayer, the minister spreads out the cloth on the table, lights the candle (unless safety requires otherwise as in the case of oxygen cylinders in use) and sets the book with the Scriptures or the Sunday Missal on the table.

Rite of Communion of the Sick

There are two Rites for Communion of the Sick. Both these Rites can be found in *Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

Rite A:

The full Rite for use when Communion takes place in ordinary circumstances, e.g. a visit to a person's home or to a private room in a hospital or nursing home. This Rite includes a Liturgy of the Word.

Rite B:

A modified Rite for use in more restrictive circumstances such as in hospital wards or nursing homes or when the sick person is very unwell.

Rite A - Holy Communion in Ordinary Circumstances

This Rite follows closely the structure of the Mass. The elements of the Rite are as follows:

- Greeting
- Penitential Act
- Scripture Reading and Response
- Prayer of the Faithful
- The Lord's Prayer
- Communion
- Silent Prayer
- Prayer after Communion
- Blessing

This outline can be used as a guide to shape a visit that is appropriate to each situation, e.g. a portion of a reading may be all that is needed by a sick person. What is important is that some effort is made to make parts of the Mass present to the sick, including some sharing of the Word.

Rite B - Holy Communion in Restrictive Circumstances

This shorter Rite contains the following elements:

- Greeting
- The Lord's Prayer
- Communion
- Concluding Prayer

Whenever possible, Communion of the Sick is accompanied by a reading of the Word of God (a small portion from the Sunday readings is suitable) and other prayers and responses associated with the Mass. Hence Rite A is used in most circumstances.

Some Practical Considerations

- a. When giving Communion to the sick person, it can happen that the minister may sometimes need to break off a portion of the Host rather than use the complete particle. Some seriously ill people may have difficulty in swallowing and their mouths may be quite dry. Thus, a drink of water immediately before or after giving Communion might be offered to help the patient swallow the sacred host.

Those with difficulty in swallowing may also be helped if the minister floats a small particle of a Host on a spoonful of water and 'feeds' the sick person with the spoon. Needless to say, if there are no more sick to be visited, the remainder of such a broken host is to be returned to the tabernacle or consumed by the minister.

- b. After distributing Holy Communion it can be most helpful for the minister to pray with the sick person - either spontaneously or by saying slowly the person's favourite prayers, e.g. the Lord's Prayer, Glory Be, Hail Mary, Anima Christi. It will be appreciated that, besides the formal prayers of the Rite of Communion to the Sick, this warmth and kindness is a way of communicating the mercy and love of Christ.
- c. Extra consecrated hosts not used after taking Communion to the sick are to be consumed by the minister or returned to the tabernacle. Do not overlook the possibility of giving the last communicant more than one consecrated host.
- d. Those who cannot receive Communion in the form of bread may receive it in the form of wine. The precious Blood must be carried to the sick person in a vessel so secured as to eliminate all danger of spilling. If all the precious Blood is not consumed, the minister consumes it and then washes the vessel with water. Water used for cleansing the vessel may be drunk or poured out in a suitable place.
- e. It is recommended that each one who has been refreshed by Communion should remain in prayer for a period of time.

Preparation of the Sick Room

It is appropriate that the following preparation be made:

A small table or sideboard area with a clean cloth, a crucifix and a lighted candle is set up near the sick bed. A small glass of water may also be required for the sick person. In many cases the minister may need to bring the suitable cloth (preferably white or cream), the crucifix and the candle(s) and many ministers would be advised to carry a small kit for this purpose.

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Fast

The sick and those who assist them are exempt from the Eucharistic fast.

“Ad Hoc” Ministers of Holy Communion

“Ad Hoc” Ministers of Holy Communion may be called upon by Priests when Acolytes or appointed Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are unavailable. However, care should be taken that they are adequately prepared for their task.

“Ad Hoc” Ministers include family members who may be appointed by the Parish Priest to give Communion to the ill, to a person with disabilities or a dying family member. As in the case of Acolytes and Ministers of Holy Communion appointed to take Communion to the sick and elderly, care is taken to preserve the ecclesial sense of continuity with both the community and the Eucharistic liturgy from which the Eucharist is brought to the sick person.

Distribution of Communion over the Easter Period

- a. Holy Communion may be taken to the sick on Holy Thursday and Good Friday.
- b. On Holy Saturday, Holy Communion may be given only by way of viaticum. (14, 15, 16 from *Communion Outside Mass* - June 21, 1973)



Order of Communion Rite

“It is most desirable that the faithful, just as the Priest himself is bound to do, receive the Lord’s Body from hosts consecrated at the same Mass and that, in the cases where this is foreseen, they partake of the chalice, so that even by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated.” (GIRM #85)

If an occasion should arise when more particles than those consecrated at a particular Eucharist are needed, the tabernacle may be approached.

The number of consecrated hosts reserved in the tabernacle should be kept to a minimum to emphasise the actual Communion at a particular Mass. Also, it has significance for the sick, for example, to know that they are communicating from a particular Mass at which they have been prayed for.

After the distribution of Communion, the gathering of the remaining particles into one vessel is done discreetly. In ordinary circumstances the Priest returns the Blessed Sacrament to the tabernacle. Local parishes may have an established custom of delegating this role to an appropriate minister. Meanwhile, the other Ministers of Communion return to their seats in a manner according to local custom. At this point in the Communion Rite the tabernacle is not the focus. The time immediately following Communion is primarily a time of prayer and thanksgiving.

Good liturgical sense suggests that the calm of the Communion reflection be established as soon as possible. During the distribution of Communion objects on the altar can be removed by the Acolyte and the Servers. The Priest moves to his chair at the earliest opportunity, thus showing that the time of prayer has commenced. (GIRM #164)

You, however, are the Body of Christ and his members.
If, therefore, you are the Body of Christ and his members,
your mystery is presented at the table of the Lord,
you receive your mystery.

To that which you are, you answer: “Amen”;
and by answering, you subscribe to it.

For you hear: “The Body of Christ!” and you answer: “Amen!”
Be a member of Christ’s Body,
so that your “Amen” may be the truth.

Saint Augustine

Appendix A

THE ROLE OF THE ACOLYTE AND ADULT ALTAR SERVER AT MASS

Before Mass Begins

- a. The Acolyte is instituted to serve at the altar and to assist the Priests and Deacon. In particular, it is up to the Acolyte to prepare the altar and the sacred vessels (GIRM #98).
- b. In the Diocese of Wollongong, adult men and women altar servers may fulfil all the duties of an Acolyte in the function of serving the Priest at the altar (GIRM #100, #107, #187-193).

Preparations for Mass

- a. Set the Altar. Prepare water and wine, breads, ciborium, chalice, candles, church lights, microphones, lectionary and Book of Gospels (set places), Missal and other ritual books needed. If incense is to be used, thurible and boat ready, charcoal alight.
- b. Acolyte and Adult Servers wear alb and cincture.

During Mass

- a. In the procession to the altar, the Acolyte or Server may carry the cross, walking between two ministers with lighted candles. Upon reaching the altar, the cross is placed upright near the altar so that it may serve as the altar cross; otherwise, it is put in a worthy place. Then the cross bearer takes his or her place in the sanctuary (GIRM #188).
- b. The procession forms in the following order:
 - » Thurifer
 - » Cross bearer (Acolyte or Adult Altar Server) flanked by two candle bearers
 - » Other Acolytes and Altar Servers
 - » Readers
 - » Deacon
 - » Celebrant (GIRM #120).

- c. If used, the thurible is presented to the Celebrant after he has kissed the altar.
- d. Through the entire celebration the Acolyte or Server is to approach the Priest or the Deacon, whenever necessary, in order to present the book to him and to assist him in any other way required. Thus, it is appropriate that, whenever possible, the Acolyte or Server occupies a place from which he or she can conveniently fulfil this ministry (GIRM #189). This does not mean the Acolyte or Server sits beside the Priest (reserved for the Deacon), or stands facing the people, or stands behind or beside the Priest at the altar during the Eucharistic prayer (reserved for other concelebrants or the Deacon).
- e. The Missal is held before the Celebrant at the chair for the Introductory Rites, concluding with the Collect. The book is held so that the Celebrant's view of the congregation is not obscured (for example, the Acolyte or Adult Altar Server stands to the side to hold the book).
- f. Candle bearers may accompany the Deacon or Celebrant in the procession to the lectern prior to the reading of the Gospel. They process to positions on either side of the lectern and face towards the lectern.
- g. If thurible is used, incense is put in the thurible prior to the Gospel. The Deacon or Celebrant is presented with the thurible after he announces "a reading from the Holy Gospel"
- h. Books are held before the Celebrant at the Creed and Prayer of the Faithful.
- i. After the Prayer of the Faithful, when no Deacon is present, the Acolyte or Server prepares the altar. The corporal is spread in the centre of the altar, chalice and purifier are placed at the right hand corner of the altar, the Missal (on stand) is placed to the left of the corporal (GIRM #139).

- j. The Acolyte or Altar Server assists the Priest in receiving the gifts of the people and, when appropriate, brings the bread and wine to the altar and hands them to the Priest (GIRM #190).
- k. If incense is used, the Acolyte or Server presents the censer (thurible) to the Priest and assists him in incensing the gifts, the cross, and the altar. Then the Acolyte or Server incenses the Priest and the people (GIRM #190).
- l. The Acolyte or other minister presents the cruets to the Priest (GIRM #142).
- m. The Celebrant's hands are washed according to local custom. Besides handling the jug and basin, the Acolyte or Server would assist by opening the towel for easier use by the Celebrant.
- n. If bells are used, the bell is rung at the elevation of the Host and Chalice according to local custom (GIRM #150).
- o. Greeting of peace is exchanged with the Celebrant and with other ministers on the sanctuary.
- p. Bell may be rung after "Lamb of God" (local custom).
- q. If needed, a duly instituted Acolyte, as an Extraordinary Minister, may assist the Priest in giving Communion to the people. If Communion is given under both kinds, when no Deacon is present, the Acolyte may administer the Chalice to the communicants (GIRM #191).
- r. If an Adult Server is also an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion he or she may also assist with the distribution of Holy Communion or may be specially deputed by the Celebrant on that occasion to do so.
- s. The GIRM assumes that Holy Communion will be distributed from hosts consecrated at that Mass. Hence, there is no mention of approaching the Tabernacle before Communion. If such a need arises due to miscalculation, the Tabernacle may be approached by the Celebrant or Deacon or one of the ministers who normally has authority to access the tabernacle.
- t. If there are consecrated hosts left after Communion, the Priest either consumes them at the altar or carries them to the Tabernacle (GIRM #163).
- u. *"After the distribution of Communion, a duly instituted Acolyte helps the Priest or Deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels. In the absence of a Deacon, a duly instituted acolyte carries the sacred vessels to the credence table, and there purifies them, wipes them and arranges them as usual"* (GIRM #192).

The purification of the vessels may be left until immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people (GIRM #163).
- v. The Acolyte or Altar Server holds the book for the Prayer after Communion and the Dismissal Rite as required.

After Mass

- a. After the celebration of Mass, the Acolyte, Adult Server and other ministers return in procession to the sacristy together with the Deacon and the Priest in the same way and order in which they entered (GIRM #193).
- b. Candles and lights are put out; books, vessels, etc, returned to cupboards - unless another Mass is to follow.

Appendix B

THE ROLE OF THE LECTOR AND READER AT MASS

Before Mass Begins

- a. On their assigned day, readers should arrive ahead of time so that they can enter a spirit of prayer before the liturgy begins. They should make certain that the Lectionary is correctly marked and that the microphone is adjusted properly.
- b. In the Diocese of Wollongong, readers may fulfil all the duties of a Lector in the function of serving the Word (GIRM #99, #101, #194-198).

Preparations for Mass

- a. **Prayerfully read the Scriptures** on a regular basis in a small group or as a private study with resources.
- b. **Visualise the congregation.** Ask God to touch their hearts. Be a witness to God's Word.
- c. **Consider how the assigned reading relates to the Gospel.** Literature is available to help with this preparation e.g. Break Open the Word (LiturgyBrisbane).
- d. **Read the text silently** several times, getting a sense of the pace and flow.
- e. **Identify the type of passage** to be read, e.g. a story or narrative, a prophecy, a parable, an instruction, a rhetorical argument, a song or poetry.
- f. **Consider the meaning.** What does the text mean within its context? Where is its climax? What is its tone and spirit: comforting, warning, informing, intimate?

- g. **Check the pronunciations and words of emphasis.** Decide important phrases or words to emphasise. Verbs are a good choice because they are active words. Give every word its value. Drop your voice at a full stop.
- h. **Practise reading aloud.** Several times! Read to another person or into a voice recorder on your phone.

During Mass

- a. **During the Introductory Rites:** In the absence of a Deacon, the Lector or reader may carry the Book of the Gospels in the procession to the altar (GIRM #194-195).
- b. **During the Liturgy of the Word:** The Lector or reader proclaims the readings from the Ambo. In the absence of a psalmist the Lector or reader may also proclaim the Responsorial Psalm. In the absence of a Deacon, the Lector or reader announces the intentions of the Universal Prayer from the Ambo (GIRM #196-197).
- c. **During other parts of the Mass:** In the absence of a choir or cantor, the Lector or reader directs the singing and the participation of the faithful. For example, if there is no singing at the Entrance or at Communion, the Lector or reader leads the assembly in reciting the antiphons given in the Missal at the appropriate time (GIRM #198). Similarly, the Lector or reader can lead the assembly in singing or reciting the Mass parts at the appropriate time, e.g. (1) by choosing and leading the Memorial Acclamation, (2) by leading the Lamb of God at the appropriate time, (3) by leading the singing of other Mass parts, especially the Alleluia, or other Gospel Acclamation, and the Sanctus Holy Holy Holy Acclamation, as agreed with the Priest.



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