



A Customary for Eucharistic Ministers and Eucharistic Visitors

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(Revised April 2024)

A Brief History of Eucharistic Ministers and Visitors

The involvement of the laity in the administration of the bread and wine (Eucharistic Minister) is a modern development brought about by the vast increase in frequency of communion in the second half of the twentieth century. It is not a revival of an ancient practice, though taking communion to the sick (Eucharistic Visitor) is a revival of an ancient practice.

An ordained minister of the church administered the bread and the wine in the early church, but taking communion to the sick was typically done by a lay member of the congregation. In the second century, Hyppolytus, a bishop of Rome, gives the earliest known description of the laity bringing the sacrament to the sick.

In time of need the deacon shall be diligent in giving the blessed bread to the sick. If there is no presbyter to give out what is to be distributed, the deacon shall pronounce the thanksgiving and shall supervise those who carry it away, to make sure that they attend to their duty and [properly] distribute the blessed food; the distributors must give it to the widows and the sick. Whoever is entrusted with the duty by the church must distribute it on the same day; if he does not, he must [at least] do so on the next day...For [it is not his own property]; it is given him only [in trust] as bread for the poor. (from *The Apostolic Tradition of Hyppolytus*, ed. Dom Gregory Dix)

As the church became the state religion after Constantine, adopting a hierarchical form of Roman government, more responsibilities were given to ordained ministers and the custom of the laity distributing the sacrament to the sick was discouraged and it eventually fell out of practice. However, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen a dramatic shift in this balance. In 1871 the Episcopal Church passed a canon allowing a lay person to lead worship in the absence of an ordained minister. In 1967 these “lay readers” were given permission to administer the chalice, and the practice of the laity taking the sacrament to the sick was revived in 1985.

Today, the canons recognize two separate ministries: Eucharistic Minister and Eucharistic Visitor. The former is permitted to distribute both the blessed bread and wine during the celebration of a Eucharist, and the latter is charged with taking the sacraments, directly following a parish celebration, to those unable to attend. The current canon reads as follows:

Title III, Canon 4, Sec. 6. A Eucharistic Minister is a lay person authorized to administer the Consecrated Elements at a Celebration of Holy Eucharist. A Eucharistic Minister should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, or otherwise, the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

Title III, Canon 4, Sec. 7. A Eucharistic Visitor is a lay person authorized to take the Consecrated Elements in a timely manner following a Celebration of Holy Eucharist to members of the congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity, were unable to be present at the Celebration. A Eucharistic Visitor should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, or otherwise, the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

Additional Resources

Atkinson, Clifford W. *A Lay Minister's Guide to the Book of Common Prayer*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1988.

Ely, Beth Wickenberg. *A Manual for Eucharistic Visitors*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2005.

Maynard, Beth. *Meditations for Lay Eucharistic Ministers*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1999.

Taylor, Charles. *The Skilled Pastor*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.

Wall, John N. *A Dictionary for Episcopalians*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications 2000.

Weil, Louis. *A Theology of Worship*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 2002.

Eucharistic Ministers

Every parish has its own unique customs and methods for the celebration of the Eucharist. Some questions a Eucharistic Minister might ask are:

- ✦ How does a Eucharistic Minister fit in to the entrance/retiring procession?
- ✦ Where does a Eucharistic Minister sit during the service?
- ✦ When and where does a Eucharistic Minister receive the elements?
- ✦ Where is the reserved consecrated bread and wine?
- ✦ Where are the additional purificators?
- ✦ What does the Eucharistic Minister do with the leftover blessed wine or bread?

Guidelines for Administering the Chalice

- ✦ Offer the cup to the communicants with the words of administration, as instructed by the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight.

“The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for thee, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life. Drink this in remembrance that Christ’s Blood was shed for thee, and be thankful.”

Or

“The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.”

Or

“The Blood of Christ, the cup of salvation.”

- ✦ Fold the embroidered portion of the purificator so lipstick does not get on the cross. Try to avoid touching the person with the purificator. Some think it is helpful to put your index finger in the fold.
- ✦ Keep your chalice at least 1/4 full.
- ✦ Encourage people to help guide the chalice to their lips. Hold on to the chalice for balance. Take the purificator and wipe the chalice and rotate the chalice 1/4 turn after each person drinks from the cup.
- ✦ Many may intinct (dip the host in the wine). Lower the chalice so they can see where the wine is and hold the purificator between the chalice and the person.

- ✦ Some may hold the host out to you indicating that you should intinct and put it on their tongue.
- ✦ Some may not receive the wine. Generally, they will cross their arms to indicate this. If so, go ahead and say the words of administration and hold the cup in front of the person.
- ✦ If you spill the wine clean it up. Ask for help.
- ✦ If you run out of wine, depending on the custom of your parish, either ask for more or go to the altar to refill from the cruet.
- ✦ If a small child is taking communion, you may ask the parent if the child would like for you to put the wafer in the wine and place it in his/her mouth.
- ✦ Depending on the custom of your congregation, find out if there is anyone in the congregation who was unable to come to the alter rail. Go with the person administering the bread to serve them.
- ✦ Depending on the custom of your congregation, after all have been served, take the chalice to the sacristy or designated place then return to your seat.

Additional Notes Regarding the Use of a Purificator

- ✦ Use a clean section of the purificator. If possible, do not reuse any portion that has already touched the cup.
- ✦ Use the whole purificator. Don't be afraid to open it up; the folds are not part of the liturgy. However, avoid using sections that are embroidered. These are very difficult to clean.
- ✦ Do not continue to use a dirty or unattractive purificator. There should be extras on the altar or credence table.
- ✦ Wipe the cup thoroughly at the section that has just been used. Rub with some force, making certain to completely remove any lipstick or other substances.

- ✦ Wipe both the outside rim, and the inside of the lip.
- ✦ Rotate the cup 1/4 turn between communicants, and after wiping with the purificator. Do this just before offering the cup, so that your rotating of the cup is seen by the communicant.

Guidelines for Administering the Bread

- ✦ Offer the bread to the communicants with the words of administration, as instructed by your priest.

“The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy body and soul into everlasting life. Take and eat this in remembrance that Christ died for thee, and feed on him in thy heart by faith, with thanksgiving.”

Or

“The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.”

Or

“The Body of Christ, the cup of salvation.”

- ✦ Place the bread in the center of the communicant’s palm.
- ✦ Some may put out their tongue indicating that you should place the host in their mouth.
- ✦ Some may not receive the bread. Generally, they will cross their arms to indicate this. If so, go ahead and say the words of administration.
- ✦ If someone desires a blessing, let a priest know so they may give one.

Eucharistic Visitors

Some questions a Eucharistic Visitor might ask of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight:

- ✦ What do I need to know that is unique to this congregation?
- ✦ What is expected of me before the service?
- ✦ What do I need to know about the person to be visited?
- ✦ What is my role during the liturgy?
- ✦ Do I go to the person's place directly after the commissioning or after the final blessing?
- ✦ What do I do with the communion kit afterwards?
- ✦ Do I need to sign the church register? Where is it?

Regarding the Role of the Eucharistic Visitor

The visitor is not a “special” person, but a member of the Christian community commissioned to act on its behalf. What is “special” are the sacraments you bring.

Pastoral care giving is a part of the ministry of all baptized persons and is not unique to the eucharistic visitor. Pastoral care is a ministry of caring and compassion.

You should refer difficult personal, relational and medical problems to the parish clergy and then to other appropriate professionals. You are not a counselor. You are not an advisor. You are not their savior. You are a caring, baptized Christian extending the parish Eucharistic community to include this person.

You might practice the following listening skills:

- ✦ Pay attention; clear your mind and concentrate.
- ✦ Maintain eye-contact; position yourself so you are not distracted by other people and activities.
- ✦ Listen for the whole message; try to pick up the nonverbal as well as verbal messages.
- ✦ Don't prejudge what someone is saying based on your feelings about their age, gender, race, voice tone, appearance, previous stands on issues, and so forth.

- ✦ Don't jump to premature conclusions or assume you know what the person is saying—ask questions to make sure you understand.
- ✦ Don't interrupt—wait until the person's complete meaning is clear.
- ✦ Don't rehearse your response while the other person is talking.
- ✦ Avoid "Pseudolistening"—deliberately looking like you're listening while thinking about something else.
- ✦ Don't fake understand—ask for clarification.

Additional Notes Regarding Preparation for a Visit

- ✦ Be sure you are expected, and be on time.
- ✦ Invite another parishioner to go with you.
- ✦ Take the consecrated elements directly to the person you are visiting. Do not stop on the way.
- ✦ Use a sacred space, such as a chapel or private altar, if available.
- ✦ Sit when invited to do so, or ask permission. Do not sit on a hospital bed.
- ✦ Take a copy of the Sunday bulletin for the person you are visiting.
- ✦ Wear normal street apparel. Avoid loose jewelry, strong fragrance, or anything else that can distract.

Outline of a Visit

- ✦ Setting up the visit
- ✦ Entering the person's space and building rapport
- ✦ Pace of the visit
- ✦ Service and administration of Communion
- ✦ Closure and reporting/referrals

Elements of Communion under Special Circumstances (BCP p. 396)

For the service during the visit you may use *Communion under Special Circumstances* found in the Book of Common Prayer pp. 396-399 or in this customary. The Lectionary Scripture Readings for Sunday are usually in your church's bulletin, or you may look up the lectionary online at <http://www.lectionarypage.net>.

- ✦ The Collect of the Day (*found in Book of Common Prayer*)
- ✦ The Gospel of the Day (*read without the introductory or concluding ascriptions*) with comments about the sermon of that day
- ✦ The Prayers
- ✦ The Confession of Sin
- ✦ The Lord's Prayer
- ✦ The Communion
- ✦ The Closing Prayer
- ✦ The Dismissal and Response

A shorter form (for the very ill) would include:

- ✦ The Gospel (*shortened to a couple of sentences or one of the alternative short passages in the Book of Common Prayer, page 397*)
- ✦ The Lord's Prayer
- ✦ The Communion
- ✦ The Closing Prayer
- ✦ The Dismissal

Communion under Special Circumstances

(adapted from the Book of Common Prayer)

The Eucharistic Visitor reads the Collect of the Day (found in the Book of Common Prayer).

The Eucharistic Visitor reads the Gospel of the Day, or else one of the following

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. *John 3:16*

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst." *John 6:35*

Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him."

John 6:51,55-56

Jesus said, "Abide in me, as I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love." *John 15:4-5a,8-9*

After the Reading, the Lay Eucharistic Visitor may comment on it briefly.

Suitable prayers may be offered, concluding with the following or some other Collect

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.*

A Confession of Sin may follow. The following or some other form is used

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry, and we humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. Amen.

The Eucharistic Visitor alone says

Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us all our sins through our Lord Jesus Christ,
strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer is said, the Lay Eucharistic Visitor first saying,

Let us pray in the words our Savior Christ has taught us.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial,
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.

The Lay Eucharistic Visitor may say the following Invitation

The Gifts of God for the People of God.

[Include the following when visiting those who are unable to take Eucharist

In union, dear Lord, with the faithful at every altar of the Church where your blessed Body and Blood are being offered to Father, we offer you praise and thanksgiving. You are truly present in the Holy Sacrament; and since (N.) cannot at this time receive you sacramentally, we beseech you to come spiritually into (his/her) soul. May (he/she) be united to you and embrace you with all the affections of (his/her) heart, never being separated from you.]

The Sacrament is administered with the following words

The Body (Blood) of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life. [Amen.]

One of the usual postcommunion prayers is then said, or the following

Gracious Father, we give you praise and thanks for this Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, the pledge of our redemption; and we pray that it may bring us forgiveness of our sins, strength in our weakness, and everlasting salvation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

The service concludes with a blessing or with a dismissal

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Title III, Canon 4

In accordance with the canons of The Episcopal Church, the Bishop of Arkansas may license confirmed communicants in good standing to serve in various liturgical and pastoral roles within the diocese. Guidelines for training Eucharistic Ministers (III.4.6) and Visitors (III.4.7) can be found in "A Customary for Eucharistic Ministers and Eucharistic Visitors." **NOTE:** Worship Leaders (III.4.5) and Preachers (III.4.6) must be trained in consultation with the bishop or the bishop's designee. Contact the bishop's office for additional information.

Once training has been completed, the applicant and the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation may complete this form and forward it to the bishop's office (The Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas, P.O. Box 164668, Little Rock, AR 72216 **OR** info@episcopalarkansas.org). Once approved, a certificate of licensure will be returned.

Please check the license(s) requested:

_____ **Worship Leader**

A Worship Leader is a lay person who regularly leads public worship under the direction of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

_____ **Preacher**

A Preacher is a lay person authorized to preach. Persons so authorized shall only preach in congregations under the direction of the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith.

_____ **Eucharistic Minister**

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Applicant's Full Name _____

Mailing Address _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail Address _____ Phone _____

Name and Location of Sponsoring Congregation _____

Signature of Member of the Clergy
or Other Congregational Leader Exercising Oversight _____

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