

Ministry of Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

Inspiration

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 Holy Communion for the sick and the homebound represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community toward those who cannot be present at the Eucharist. For the sick the reception of communion is not only a privilege but also a sign of support and concern that is shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill.

Practical Considerations for Ministers of Holy Communion for the Sick and Homebound

- Know that the relationship with the person who is sick is a key factor. The minister brings the comfort and concern of Christ.
- Be aware of feelings that may arise when you enter a person's home or room – the person's appearance, hospital equipment, and the environment. When it is difficult to look at the person because of their physical condition, concentrate on their eyes.
- Take proper time for introduction and personal sharing. Listen attentively.
- If you are uncertain or suspect sensitive conditions, check with the family or the nurse for more information.
- Be sensitive to feelings of loneliness and depression. Consider the situation and desires of the person who is sick and make decisions based on this information before beginning the Communion Rite.
- Be prepared in the face of refusal or rejection by either the person who is sick or by a family member. Be ready to offer modified services in such cases.
- If the person does not wish to share Holy Communion at this time, ask if they would like to share in a short blessing prayer.
- Be aware of making referrals when other services are needed. (Confessor, counselor, doctor, etc.) Do not try to solve problems.

- If the sick wish to celebrate the sacrament of penance, encourage them or the family to be in contact with the parish priest. You might also offer to relay the message yourself.
- Keep confidences at all times.
- The trainer of Holy Communion Ministers for the sick and homebound should be available to those visiting the sick in order that they might share their feelings and experiences.
- Please bring a copy of our Parish Bulletin.

Procedures and Pastoral Notes Concerning the Rite of Communion with the Sick and the Homebound

BEFORE VISITING

- Collect information about the person who is sick and other helpful information for your visit to the home or hospital.
- Carry the host in a pyx. Have respect and reverence for the presence of Christ.
- When transporting the Eucharist to the sick or homebound, ministers should avoid any activity not in keeping with the reverence due to the Blessed Sacrament.
- Wear attire appropriate to the ministry.

AS YOU BEGIN THE VISIT

- Share greetings and introductions; give some ideas from the homily and the bulletin if the person shows interest in the parish.
- After listening to the conditions and desires of the person who is sick, ask if the person desires Holy Communion at this time.

THE RITE

- Pace the ritual with sensitivity. Be aware of the sick person's ability to follow.
- Adapt to the situation of each visit.
- If the family suggests setting a simple table with candles and holy water, agree with this but do not insist upon it when the family is not ready or unfamiliar with the practice.
- Give a small portion of the host to a person who has difficulty swallowing. Check with the nurse or doctor in cases of special feeding.

- Wait for the person to swallow the host. Offer water if necessary. Be prepared with a cloth in the event that the person has problems.
- Take time to pray reverently and to be present with the sick person and the family.
- Be sensitive to the proper time to depart.

Frequently Asked Questions about Taking Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound

1. WHEN DO I TAKE COMMUNION TO THE SICK PERSON?

It is best to take Holy Communion directly from the community's celebration of Eucharist in the church to the person in the home. If this is not reasonable, and no substitute is available, please take It as soon as possible, showing respect for the presence of Christ.

“NO one gives what one does not have!” If you haven't received JESUS in the Eucharist, what are you going to give?

2. IF TAKING HOLY COMMUNION IS ONLY PART OF MY VISIT WITH THE SICK OR HOMEBOUND PERSON, SHOULD PRAYER AND COMMUNION BE AT THE BEGINNING OR END OF OUR TIME TOGETHER?

There is no set rule but most people find it more comfortable to spend some time in conversation before sharing prayer and Holy Communion. The conversation could include ideas from the homily and reassurance that the parish community prayerfully supports that person. If the sick or homebound person prefers time for private devotion, it is suggested that you visit before prayer and indicate that you will leave immediately after distribution of Communion so as to allow time for quiet reflection and devotion. This respects the privacy of the person while also honoring the importance of communal prayer as part of Eucharist.

3. WHAT PRAYERS DO I SAY WHEN I TAKE COMMUNION TO THE SICK?

Kindly check the booklet that is used in giving Holy Communion to the Sick and the Homebound.

4. IF OTHERS ARE PRESENT, SHOULD I INVITE THEM TO PRAY AND RECEIVE COMMUNION WITH THE SICK PERSON?

Yes, others should be invited to join in prayer.

5. ARE THE SICK OR HOMEBOUND REQUIRED TO FAST AN HOUR BEFORE RECEIVING COMMUNION?

No, they may receive Communion at any hour and need not adhere to the normal fasting regulations.

6. WHAT IF THE SICK PERSON IS UNABLE TO SWALLOW THE ENTIRE HOST?

Water may be offered to the sick person receiving Communion to aid in swallowing the host. If warranted, just a small portion of the host can be offered if the person is too ill to receive the entire host. The remaining portion of that host must be consumed by you as minister of Holy Communion. Remember that the divine presence in the Blessed Sacrament is the same regardless of the size of the portion of the host. Consult with the family concerning the condition of the person regarding swallowing.

7. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF THE HOST IS DROPPED OR THE PERSON REMOVES IT FROM HIS/HER MOUTH?

If the host is dropped and there are no health concerns, the host may be picked up and consumed. If the dropped host presents health concerns or the person removes the host from his/her mouth, it should be dissolved in water and the water poured into the church sacarium, not down a drain. Of course, if anyone declines or refuses to receive Communion, you would respect this wish.

8. WHAT DO I DO WITH THE PYX WHEN I AM NOT USING IT TO TAKE COMMUNION TO THE SICK?

The pyx should be kept in a safe and respectful place when not in use. Take the pyx to the community's celebration of Eucharist on the day of visiting the sick. When a minister no longer needs the pyx, it is returned to the parish office or the pastor.
