



Diocese of Austin

Worship Office

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Hygiene For The Liturgical Assembly Including Liturgical Ministers

Common Best Practices

As we enter the flu season, increased attention to hygiene due to the Flu and other infectious diseases is certainly appropriate. Please use this opportunity to remind ministers and parishioners of common sense practices and liturgical guidelines many of which were taught to us from our earliest days as sage advice from our parents: cover your mouth (when you cough or sneeze), keep your fingers out of your mouth and away from your nose and eyes. Wash your hands after contact with surfaces others have touched, after using the restroom, after blowing your nose. If a person has a fever, is vomiting, or has had either ailment within 24 hours of the Mass, they should not participate in Mass.

It is important to keep the flu situation in perspective. Every year, approximately 36,000 people in the United States die due to flu related illnesses. If people have the flu, they should stay home and consult their physician. Ministers who have the flu or other communicable illness should not serve the liturgical assembly. Please see the USCCB site for a question and answer page on the topic: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacred-art-and-music/influenza-and-the-liturgy.cfm>.

General Reminder

All the faithful, and especially liturgical ministers, should be mindful of these basic norms:

1. **Sunday Obligation:** Catholics are not obliged to participate in the Mass on Sunday if they are ill. It is a matter of respect and hospitality not to gather for Mass on Sunday if one is sick. Those unable to participate in Mass, if able, should still observe Sunday, the original feast day, by spending time in prayer; giving thanks to God for life, and our redemption in Christ; recalling our many blessings, praying for strength and healing; and praying for the needs of others. Reading and reflecting on the readings of the day is beneficial. The Scripture texts as well as an audio reflection are available at <http://www.usccb.org/nab/>.
2. **Cleanliness & Hygiene:** The faithful who gather for Mass including liturgical ministers should be clean and reverently dressed. Ministers should wash their hands before leaving home. It is also appropriate for ministers to wash their hands at the church immediately before Mass if this is possible. During the celebration of Mass, ministers should be observant in order to maintain clean hands. This is certainly true of altar servers, extraordinary and ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, and ushers as they come in direct contact with vessels and/or the faithful. Ministers should avoid: touching their face during the Mass, sneezing or coughing into their hands; or assisting an ill child during Mass. Ministers should cough or sneeze into a tissue, handkerchief or their sleeve. The minister should wash his or her hands if they come into contact with surfaces or individuals, which may have soiled their hands.

Holy Communion

Communicants:

- If choosing to receive on the tongue, extend your tongue sufficiently making it easy to receive communion without the minister touching your tongue.
- Do not receive from the chalice if you have a sore throat or other symptoms of illness.

Every few years, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops contacts the Centers for Disease Control regarding the norms for distribution of Holy Communion. The response has always been that there is no

documented evidence of transmission of pathogens when parishes follow the established norms for distribution (see “Liturgical Ministers” below).

Communion under both forms is a richer sacramental sign in response to our Lord’s instruction to “take and eat” and “take and drink.” However, the doctrine of concomitance reminds us that the real sacramental presence of Christ (body, blood, soul, and divinity) is present entirely under each species, bread or wine.

Liturgical Ministers

Procedures and common best practices are listed here.

1. **Service to the Community:** Liturgical ministers are at the service of the community. Serving when sick is not appropriate or desired. Liturgical ministers who are scheduled to serve but who are ill should, if able, contact their ministry coordinator or another minister in order to report their illness and inability to serve. This is done to notify the parish so that other liturgical ministers may be located. More importantly, the parish wants to know when parishioners are ill so that the parish community may care for them.
2. **Hand Sanitizer:** In addition to washing hands before Mass, some parishes ask ministers to cleanse their hands with alcohol based hand sanitizer gel. The hand sanitizer dispenser should not be placed on the credence table and absolutely not on the altar. Another option is an individual “handi-wipe” product with hand sanitizer that can be made available in the sacristy before Mass to be used in the pew before approaching the altar. Ministers are to ensure the applied sanitizer is completely dry before ministering communion.
3. **Ministers of Holy Communion (ordinary and extraordinary):**
 - a. *Ministering the Body of Christ:* when ministering on the tongue take care to avoid touching the communicant’s tongue.
 - b. *Ministering the Blood of Christ:*
 - i. *Purificator:* The minister should use the entire surface of the purificator so that the same spot on the purificator is not used repeatedly to wipe the chalice.
 - ii. *Wiping the chalice:* After each communicant, the minister wipes the lip of the chalice both inside **and** outside.
 - iii. *Turn the chalice:* After each wiping the chalice lip the chalice is turned about ¼ turn before the next communicant receives.
 - c. *General Comment:* The above practices combined with the alcohol content of the wine, the non-porous material of the chalice, and the common practice of the faithful choosing not to receive from the chalice when feeling a bit under the weather all help to avoid the transmission of most pathogens.
4. **Hand Washing:** In addition to the above comments it is wise for liturgical ministers, especially, ministers of Holy Communion (ordinary and extraordinary), ushers, greeters and others who have come in contact with many people, to wash their hands immediately following Mass and to avoid touching their mouth, nose and eyes until they have washed their hands.

Holy Water Fonts

Holy water fonts should be frequently drained and cleaned after the Sunday Masses and other large gatherings in order to prevent the build up of minerals in the vessel as well as to replace the holy water with clean holy water. Drained Holy Water should be poured onto grass or into a flowerbed.

Collection Counters

Cash is very dirty having come in contact with many hands and surfaces. Those counting the collection should avoid touching their faces (mouths, nose, and eyes) while counting money and wash their hands thoroughly following. Latex gloves should be worn while counting the collection.