

Dear Friends,

As promised, I'm following-up last week's article with a bit more history and background about Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. I am incorporating some notes and recollections from long-time parishioner, Ellie Nasser, who has been involved in parish liturgical planning for several years. I am most grateful for her contribution to our parish.

First, let me point out that the guidelines for the preparation and celebration of the sacraments in parishes in the Diocese of Rochester come from the Bishop who is the author of these guidelines. As he forms these policies, the Bishop takes direction from the liturgical books (described below), directives and decrees from the Vatican, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (if applicable). In the decade after the Second Vatican Council, liturgical practice was subject to experimentation (for better or for worse). When Bishop Clark arrived in 1979, one of his tasks was a standardization of sacramental guidelines. The first set was implemented in 1981, with revisions in the late 1990s and again in 2005. Before he retired, he convened a committee to review policies and prepare drafts of revisions for his successor. Bishop Cunningham, who was our administrator for one year (2013-2014), retained the committee and made some revisions of his own. Bishop Matano inherited and completed the work that was done by the committee, and began implementing the practices about a year after his arrival (2015). Last year, the volume was completed. Just to give you an example, our parish implemented the new guidelines for the preparation and reception of Confirmation under the direction of Laretta Beale when she came on board in 2015. The guidelines are not just about rubrics and execution, but stress adequate preparation and catechesis.

The liturgical books are the prime source for guidelines. In regards to the Mass, the Source and Summit of the Christian life, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal guides not only the celebration of the Most Holy Eucharist in the Roman Rite, but also defines procedures, terms, protocols, etc. The most recent revision (Third Edition) was implemented in Advent 2011 when the English translation for the Mass was revised. Much of what you will see in the new procedures for Holy Communion comes from directives from the Vatican.

In 1975, when the Second Edition of the Roman Missal was promulgated, it included a provision that restored lay ecclesial ministry; in particular, lectors to proclaim the Word of God at Mass and Extraordinary Ministers to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion at Mass. Subsequently, the task was extended to bring Holy Communion to those who were home or hospital bound. The document "On Evangelization in the Modern World" was the impetus for lay ministry at Mass. "The laity can also be called to cooperate with their pastors in service of the ecclesial community, for the sake of its growth and life. This can be done through the exercise of different kinds of ministries, according to the grace and charisms that the Lord has been pleased to bestow on them at their Baptism." The point is that these ministries are of vital assistance to the pastor and priests of the parish. All ministerial functions assist the pastor in guiding and shepherding the flock.

Some will recall the days when Holy Communion was distributed at the altar rail. This practice changed with the New Mass as the procedure for processing in line to receive communion took hold. As the number of priests dwindled, Extraordinary Ministers were introduced. In 1983, the term "Extraordinary Minister" was defined in the Code of Canon Law, which is the binding source of law and governance in the Church.

Yet, like some parishioners who resist change, some priests also delayed accepting these practices. Locally, St. Patrick's Church was one of the first in the diocese to introduce these ministries. Other parishes, such as St. Vincent, had an abundance of retired priests and the introduction of lay ministers (Extraordinary) for the distribution of Holy Communion was not needed until the late 1970s/early 1980s. The practice at St. Mary's and Immaculate Heart varied, according to some accounts.

But that was then, and this is now. Even today, practices vary between parishes because of the need, blueprint of the church building, etc. Moving to one worship site last year revealed the need for retraining to bring our ministers together in a consistent practice. It took almost one year; I cannot thank enough the ministers who waited patiently for this moment! Several have remarked that this is not only a time of renewal for those who distribute, but also for all who receive. This opportunity and training is a reminder to all of us of the sacred act of receiving our Lord in the Eucharist.

Reverence is of prime importance, but no matter if It is received on the tongue or the hands, please be mindful of the Real Presence of Jesus. He is to be received on the tongue, not the teeth; the palm of the hand, fingers are not appropriate. At times it is a challenge while trying to receive our Lord when carrying a small child, but a reverent example will make a lasting impression on a young person. Bowing or kneeling is not necessary, though some have chosen to make it their practice. When receiving, the response is simply "Amen" with no additions or substitutes. "Amen" is the most succinct expression that we are receiving the Body and Blood of Christ.

Boring? Interesting? Exciting? Disappointing? I am sure the gamut of emotions runs free – but let us not forget the assent of our minds to matters of faith and discipline.

Again, thank you for being patient as these new procedures will take time to work out. Please pray for those involved!

In Christ,  
Fr. Jones