



Secretariat for Laity, Family, and Life

Ministry to the Sick and Homebound
Policy and Norms

Revised: June 2023



Do not hesitate to visit the sick, because for such things you will be loved. (Sir 7:35)

I. INTRODUCTION

Faithful Catholics are strengthened in their journey of discipleship by the sacraments of Christ and His Church. The Catechism of the Catholic uses the biblical image of Jesus' healing of the woman afflicted by hemorrhage to describe the sacraments when it says that they are "powers that come forth from the Body of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1116). Through the sacraments of the Church Jesus continues his redeeming work in our present time. "The healing power that emanates from the body of Christ, which is the Church, is actualized in the sacraments, to heal the wound of sin and to give new life in Christ."¹

Within the Catholic Church, one important ministry that actively participates in this healing mission is the Pastoral Care of the Sick. While traditionally carried out by priests and other ordained ministers, the Church also recognizes the valuable role of lay people in this ministry. As baptized members of the Church, lay ministers are also called to share in the work of Christ, and one way they can do so is by extending pastoral care and support to the sick and suffering. "When the Church cares for the sick, it serves Christ himself in the suffering members of his Mystical Body" (Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship).

Ministers to the Sick and Homebound visit the sick, bringing the presence of Christ, in both the Eucharist and the parish community, and the comfort of the Church to those in need. They offer prayers, listen to the concerns of the sick, provide companionship during difficult times, and when appropriate distribute communion to the faithful who are prevented from being present at the eucharistic celebration of their parish community.

Pastors particularly are encouraged to take notice of those faithful parishioners whose participation in the celebration of Mass may wane. A phone call or email or personal note through the postal service can be an invitation of God's love and care, much needed during a time of difficulty, whether physical or spiritual.

¹ *The Reciprocity Between Faith And Sacraments In The Sacramental Economy*, International Theological Commission



II. PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK – MINISTRY PARTICIPATION

The ministry is to be provided by priests, deacons, and where necessary, by appointed and trained lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC). To participate in the Ministry of Pastoral Care of the Sick, an EMHC must make a request (in writing by way of the diocesan application) to serve as a Minister to the Sick, be interviewed by the parish Pastoral Care Coordinator (or equivalent) and receive the approval of their pastor. Please note that Ministers to the Sick are volunteers and must adhere to the *Use of Volunteer Policy*. The minimum qualifications for someone serving as a Minister to the Sick and Homebound (MTS) are:

- A fully initiated Catholic 18 years of age or older
- A Catholic in good standing (*i.e., participates in the celebration of Mass at least weekly, receives the Sacrament of Reconciliation and participates in other liturgical offerings such as Eucharistic Adoration regularly*)
- An active participant in the local parish community
- Must be fingerprinted and in compliance with diocesan *Safe Environment Policy and Procedures*
- A trained EMHC with a current mandate (*EMHC training is governed by a separate diocesan policy and is overseen by the Office of Liturgy*).
- A verified driver that complies with the *diocesan Driver's License Verification Policy* and procedures

Other key qualities to consider when searching for and appointing Ministers to the Sick and Homebound. Ministers should have the ability to:

- Show compassion and empathy.
- Be sensitive to the person's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs.
- Maintain confidentiality when appropriate and respect the dignity of the person.
- Be patient and present during the visitation.
- Be willing to maintain contact with the Pastoral Care Coordinator (or equivalent) informing them or the parish priest of other pastoral requests/needs (*i.e., anointing, reconciliation, or pastoral visit*).



- Be observant of any physical, social, and/or safety needs of a homebound person, that should be brought to the attention of the parish staff for the safety and wellbeing of the homebound person.

III. TRAINING, QUALIFICATION PROCESS, AND RENEWAL

To begin the qualification process for this ministry, individuals must hold a valid and current EMHC mandate. Mandates are specific to each parish and cannot be transferred. The Petition for Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion includes a section relevant to this ministry. MTS mandates align with the EMHC mandate, meaning they expire together, and are valid for a period of 5 years. Prior to involvement in this ministry an individual must complete the qualification process. Ministers to the Sick and Homebound represent the Church and serve as pastoral caregivers, therefore it is necessary that they be trained and qualified for this responsibility. The process outlined below is the standard for this ministry:

1. Completing Safe Environment Training and successfully passed the diocesan fingerprinting process.
2. Completing the *Adult Driver Information Form* and the *Drivers License MVR Request Approval Form*
3. Completing the Ministry to the Sick and Homebound application form, interviewing with the parish coordinator for this ministry, and receiving pastor's approval.
4. Submitting the MTS application packet to the Office of Pastoral Ministry and registering for a diocesan *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Lay Ministry to the Sick and Homebound* formation/training workshop.
5. Training on procedures for MTS at the parish-level by parish coordinator/staff.
6. A minimum of three (3) shadow visits with an experienced minister; one to the hospital, one to a long-term care facility, and one to a private residence.

Upon successful completion of the qualification process, a certificate of completion will be issued by the Office of Pastoral Ministry. Only after an individual has received the certificate can they begin ministry.



Continuing Formation and Renewal of Mandates. To renew their mandates, each minister is expected to complete 3 hours annually of continuing formation and spiritual enrichment (total of 15 hours in a mandate period of 5 years). Continuing formation should be tracked by the individual and parish to be submitted for mandate renewal. Please note that while fingerprinting/background checks must be renewed every five years, this should not be confused with the mandate renewal process.

IV. VISITATION GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

It is most fitting to bring Communion to the sick from the Mass at the parish community. A rite of blessing and dismissal is appropriate as the ministers are sent forth to the sick or elderly.² Please see Appendix II for an example of this kind of rite. No person may approach an EMHC during Communion with a pyx to be filled for the purpose of taking the Eucharist outside the Church.

When taking the Eucharist to the sick, it is essential to handle it with utmost reverence. The Eucharist should be placed in a pyx, preferably within a burse, and carried by the minister on their person. Ministers to the Sick are encouraged to maintain silence, engage in prayer, and remain acutely aware of the sacred responsibility entrusted to them as they bear the Eucharist.

Ministers to the Sick and Homebound should refrain from running errands, such as shopping, while in possession of the Blessed Sacrament. It is also important to note that the Eucharist should never be kept in the homes of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for distribution at a later time. The Eucharist must be promptly and directly taken from the parish to the sick without any interruptions. Parishes should establish procedures and norms with regards to how unused Hosts are to be returned in cases of overages.

Ministers to the Sick and Homebound should wear a volunteer lanyard with identification from the parish that contains the individual's photo and the parish name. Parish identification should also be worn in a hospital setting together with the appropriate hospital badge/pass.

² *Pastoral Care of the Sick*, n. 73 and Code of Canon Law, c.922.



Ministers to the Sick may not use candles, holy water, or oils in the exercise of their ministry of pastoral visitation. All ministers visiting an assisted care or hospital will observe standard precautions for patient care as delineated by the facility. Please be aware that patients might have some restrictions, such as “nothing by mouth” (NPO) or Isolation Precautions. Ministers should always check-in with the appropriate healthcare worker at the facility before entering a patient’s room.

Ministers are to observe strict confidentiality and follow the policies of the health institution they are visiting. It is the responsibility of the minister to maintain a safe environment during the visit. The minister is cautioned to be aware of personal boundaries.

The Minister should:

- Be prepared to make home visits, make rounds in a hospital, care facility or private residence to conduct a Communion service in a chapel or other designated area,
- Have the appropriate materials needed for the visitation,
- Be familiar with the different forms for the Communion of the Sick and Homebound,
- Be familiar with the readings of the day, scripture passages or other appropriate prayers,
- Be mindful of the importance of praying with the person,
- Notify the pastor:
 - When an individual or family requests a priest, or desires Confession and/or Anointing of the Sick.
 - If there is any uncertainty of an individual’s ability to receive Holy Communion (i.e. has not received 1st Communion, in an irregular marriage, etc.)
 - An individual is transferred from his/her private home to a care facility. An individual is discharged from a facility and they have requested a visit from the parish at his/her private home.
 - An individual is now receiving services from hospice.
 - An individual no longer needs to have visits made to the facility or the home.
 - An individual dies.
 - Do not abandon the family’s need for spiritual works of mercy. This may be an important time by your care to invite their participation in the communal act of laying their loved one in their final place of rest.



The Minister must not:

- Visit a sick person if the Minister is not feeling well.
- Stay too long or take the role of a counselor or confidant.
- Compete with a television or radio.
- The Minister should politely ask if these can be turned off during the service.
- Leave the Consecrated Host with someone else if the sick person cannot receive it. Instead, the Minister should return another time to see the sick person.
- Accept gifts of any kind for visitation.

V. VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES FOR VISITATION

Ministers to the Sick and Homebound follow the rites prescribed in *Communion to the Sick* when distributing communion. This booklet contains the approved rites for use in the United States and is excerpted from *Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

- When in a group setting, the minister should use “Communion in Ordinary Circumstances” (*long form*)
- When in individual rooms of a facility, the minister should use “Communion in a Hospital or Institution” (*short form*)

Ministers visiting hospitals, nursing homes, and long-term care facilities must follow all visitation protocols established by the host facility. It is recommended that the parish would know the established protocols and communicate the expectation prior to scheduling a minister to the facility. The minister should ensure the Holy Communion is picked up from the parish, transported with due dignity, distributed as prescribed by the rite and received by the Catholic person and upon completion of the rite, consume any excess Hosts privately.

Ministers visiting the homebound are to ensure they have all necessary information prior to making the visit. This can include name of resident, address (including neighborhood entry codes), will there be other family members in attendance, precautions to be considered for the protection of the minister (i.e. the presence of pets), and/or other relevant information to make this visit a success. When visiting someone who is homebound, but does recover, be sure to invite the individual to return physically to the celebration of Mass. If possible, affirm the individual when he/she returns.



Ministry to the Sick and Homebound Policy and Norms

If you have any questions about Ministry to the Sick and Homebound, please contact:

Office of Pastoral Ministry
Secretariat for Laity, Family, and Life

Email: slfl@orlandodiocese.org

Phone: (407) 246-4882



APPENDIX I: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Can the Deacon/Minister Anoint?

No. The Anointing of the Sick (in the past called Extreme Unction) is administered only by a priest. The Deacon/Minister can be an instrument for helping those visited to understand the healing purpose of this sacrament and to prepare the person to accept and receive the anointing from the parish priest. The Deacon/Minister is NOT to bring or use oils during the visitation to avoid any possible confusion.

When Do I Take Communion to the Sick/Homebound Person?

It is best to take Holy Communion directly from the community's celebration of the Mass, showing all due respect for the presence of Christ, directly to the facility or residence. Receive the consecrated Host in the manner established by the parish. When the visitation is scheduled outside of the parish normal Mass time follow the parish protocols for retrieving the Eucharist from the Tabernacle.

What 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 the Visitation?

There is no set guidance. Many find it advantageous 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 them. If the person prefers time for private devotion, it is suggested that you visit before their prayer time and leave immediately after distribution of Communion to allow time for quiet reflection and devotion. This respects the privacy of the person while also honoring the importance of communal prayer of the Eucharist.

If Others Are Present, Should I Invite Them to Pray and Receive Communion with the Sick or Homebound Person?

All present may be invited to join in prayer. If other Catholics are present and ask to receive, provided the people are properly disposed and present themselves in the appropriate manner, the minister may distribute Holy Communion to them.

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.



What If the Sick Person Is Unable to Swallow the Entire Host?

Consult the family concerning the condition of the person regarding swallowing. Water may be offered to the sick person receiving Holy Communion as an aid in swallowing. If the person's condition warrants, a smaller portion of the Host can be offered. The remaining portion of that Host must be consumed by someone who is participating in the prayer or the minister. The Divine Presence is the same regardless of the portion size received.

What Should I Do If the Host Is Dropped or the Person Removes It From Their 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 their mouth, it should be dissolved in water and the water poured onto the ground in area which does not receive vehicular or pedestrian traffic. Of course, if anyone declines or refuses to receive Communion, you are to respect this wish.

What Do I Do with the Pyx When I Am Not Using It for a Visitation?

The Body of Christ is present in the tiny particles that may fall off the Host, during transportation and rest at the bottom of the pyx. These particles must be treated with the utmost care and concern for they are the sacred Body of the Lord. A simple method for purifying a pyx is to run a small amount of water into the empty pyx, swirl the water around in order for the pyx to be fully washed, and then pour the water into a drinking glass and then consumed by the minister. Additionally, following proper purification, the pyx should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and water on the inside and out.

If the pyx belongs to the minister, keep it in a safe and respectful place when not in use.
If the pyx belongs to the parish return it to the Pastoral Care Coordinator (or equivalent).

What if the condition of the sick person changes?

Please contact the Pastoral Care Coordinator or parish office if there is a change in the condition of the sick or homebound person. Someone can arrange for a visit and reception of the sacrament of reconciliation and anointing of the sick. Communication is important and welcome.



APPENDIX II:

Blessing and Dismissal from Mass for Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion Bringing Communion to the Sick and Homebound

This dismissal is an example and may be adapted according to the customs of each community.

Ministers to the Sick are called forth from the assembly after Communion has been distributed to the assembled community.

At the altar, the Priest places the required number of hosts, consecrated at the Mass, into each pyx. He closes the pyxes and hands them to the Ministers to the Sick.

The Ministers to the Sick remain there as the Priest addresses the assembly and the ministers, with prayers of blessing and direction, using one of these or similar words:

“As you go to the sick and the homebound, take with you not only the sacrament we have celebrated, but also the Word of God which we have heard, as well as the affection of this parish community. Ask for the prayers of those whom you visit in return. Go, now, with God’s peace and blessing.”

or

“Brothers and sisters, you are sent from this assembly to bring the Word of God and the Bread of Life to the sick and homebound members of our parish family. Go to them with our love, our care and our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and gentle healer.”

The Prayer after Communion follows. It is recommended that the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who take Communion to the sick then depart immediately for their visits to the sick.

(Lay Minister)

Sign of the Cross 

People: *✠ Blessed be God for ever.*

The minister then places the Blessed Sacrament on the Table and all join in adoration.

Minister: To prepare ourselves for this celebration, let us call to mind our sins. (PAUSE)

(A) heal us and bring us strength:
Lord have mercy. *℟* Lord have mercy

I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and what I have failed to do.

[And, striking their breast, they say:]

through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;

[Then they continue:]

therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-Virgin
and all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.

(B)

Minister: Lord Jesus, you healed the sick:
Lord have mercy. *℟ Lord have mercy*

Minister: Lord Jesus, you forgave sinners:
Christ have mercy. *✠ Christ have mercy*

Minister: Lord Jesus, you give us yourself to

Minister: May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life. *℟ Amen*

Liturgy of the Word

The word of God is proclaimed by one of those present or by the minister. One of the following scripture passages or another biblical passage may be used. Perhaps the gospel reading from the previous Sunday can be used.

John 6:51; John 6:54-58; John 14:6; John 15:5; the First Letter of St. John 4:16

The Minister may give a brief explanation of the reading if they have been trained in this capacity.

Universal Prayer

The Universal Prayer (Prayer of the Faithful) may be said. Consider using the prayers that were used on the previous Sunday for the parish Masses. For examples of this prayer please see those responsible for preparing them at your parish.

Liturgy of Holy Communion

Lord's Prayer

The minister introduces the Lord's Prayer in these or similar words:

Minister: Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us... Our Father...

Communion

The Minister shows the Eucharistic Bread to those present saying:

Minister: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

℟ Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The minister goes to the sick person and shows the Blessed Sacrament saying:

Minister: The Body of Christ. *℟ Amen.*

Others present who wish to receive Communion then do so in the usual way. The minister should consume the remaining Eucharist immediately following distribution of the last person they are visiting. Care must be taken to only bring the amount of consecrated hosts for the number of people being visited. If necessary, it is permissible to break the hosts into smaller pieces to accommodate those receiving.

The vessel is purified by placing water in the vessels in order to catch any remaining particles, consuming the water and then drying with a purificator.



Prayer after Communion:

The minister says the concluding prayer.

Minister: Let us pray.

PAUSE

Nourished by this sacred gift, O Lord,
we give you thanks and beseech your mercy,
that, by the pouring forth of your Spirit,
the grace of integrity may endure
in those your heavenly power has entered.
Through Christ our Lord,

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R Amen

Concluding Rite

A minister who is not a Priest or Deacon invokes God's blessing and makes the Sign of the Cross on himself or herself, while saying:

Minister: May the Lord bless us,
protect us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life.

R Amen

There is no dismissal

Scripture Passages

John 6:51

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus says: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven: whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world." The Gospel of the Lord.

John 14:6

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." The Gospel of the Lord.

1 John 4:16

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John.

We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him. The word of the Lord

This sample ritual is for educational/formation purposes only. Those who are to become Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to the Sick and Homebound are to use the appropriate ritual from which this sample has been excerpted. Parishes should refer to provide their ministers with the proper ritual that can be obtained in a bilingual edition from Catholic Book Publishing Corp., New Jersey.

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Communion Rite Outside of Mass – Communion in a Hospital or Institution (Lay Minister)

Upon entering the room

Sign of the Cross ✠

Greeting

Minister: The peace of the Lord be with you.
Blessed be God for ever.

People: *R* Blessed be God for ever.

The minister then places the Blessed Sacrament on the Table and all join in adoration.

Liturgy of the Word

If time permits, a short scripture passage is proclaimed.

Lord's Prayer

When circumstances permit (if there are not several rooms to visit) the minister is encouraged to lead the sick in the Lord's Prayer using the following formula.

Minister: Let us pray with confidence to the Father in the words our Savior gave us... Our Father...

Communion

The Minister shows the Eucharistic Bread to those present saying:

Minister: Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

R Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

The minister goes to the sick person and shows the Blessed Sacrament saying:

Minister: The Body of Christ. *R* Amen.

Others present who wish to receive Communion then do so in the usual way. After the last room is visited the minister should consume the remaining Eucharist immediately following distribution. Care must be taken to only bring the amount of consecrated hosts for the number of people being visited. If necessary it is permissible to break the hosts into smaller pieces to accommodate those receiving.

Concluding Prayer:

The Concluding prayer may be said either in the last room visited (if there is more than one room being visited) or after all in one room who wish to receive have done so (if there is only one room visited).

Minister: Let us pray.

PAUSE

Nourished by this sacred gift, O Lord,
we give you thanks and beseech your mercy,
that, by the pouring forth of your Spirit,
the grace of integrity may endure
in those your heavenly power has entered.
Through Christ our Lord,

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R Amen

The vessel is purified by placing water in the vessels in order to catch any remaining particles, consuming the water and then drying with a purificator.

Scripture Passages

John 6:51

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John.

Jesus says: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven: whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world." The Gospel of the Lord.

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A reading from the first Letter of Saint John.

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