

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Updated February 18, 2015

General Principles

References

See the most recent, guiding document: *Administration of Communion and Viaticum by an Extraordinary Minister from Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, USCCB (Washington D.C.: January, 2013).

Ordinary Ministers

In every celebration of the Eucharist, there should be a sufficient number of ministers of Holy Communion so that it may be distributed in a reverent and orderly manner. Bishops, priests and deacons distribute Holy Communion in virtue of their office as ordinary ministers of the Body and Blood of the Lord.¹



Extraordinary Ministers

When the size of the congregation or the incapacity of the bishop, priest, or deacon requires it, the celebrant may be assisted by other bishops, priests, or deacons. If such ordinary ministers of Holy Communion are not present, “the priest may call upon extraordinary ministers to assist him, i.e., duly instituted acolytes or even other faithful who have been deputed for this purpose. In case of necessity, the priest may also depute suitable faithful for this single occasion.”²

When recourse is had to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, especially in the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, their number should not be increased beyond what is required for the orderly and reverent distribution of the Body and Blood of the Lord.

For the laity, to bear and distribute Holy Communion is a tremendous privilege and not a right. As such, it is important to understand that liturgical ministries exist in service to the Mystical Body of Christ more than any accolades or spiritual graces they bring to us. It is important to remember that the blessing of being an EMHC does not confer a permanent sacred character like that of Holy Orders. Because of this, EMHC should periodically and humbly evaluate their own abilities, dependability, state of grace, and motives for distributing Holy Communion. The pastor will offer such guidance as well. If there should ever come a time when the EMHC or the pastor has discerned that it is better for an EMHC to withdraw from the ministry, we hope that such a decision will be met with docility and understanding on both sides.

¹ *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America [NDRHC] (August, 2002), no. 26 and cf. GIRM no. 162 and NRHC, no. 28.*

² GIRM 162.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Fidelity

EMHC are public figures exercising a public ministry in the name of the Catholic Church. It is essential, then, that EMHC remain in the state of grace when distributing Holy Communion, utilizing the sacrament of Reconciliation when necessary, and also refraining from giving scandal by public, manifest, grave sins of any kind. EMHC must be examples to the flock of faithful discipleship. Each person selected for this ministry should be a practicing Catholic, in good standing, whose conduct of life does not contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church as described by the Magisterium, and who is fully initiated through the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist.

Profession: St. Gregory's Oath for Berengarius (from Mansi, *Collectio Amplissima Conciliorum*, XX, 524D)

I believe in my heart and openly profess that the bread and wine that are placed on the altar are, through the mystery of the sacred prayer and the words of the Redeemer, substantially changed into the true and proper and life-giving flesh and blood of Jesus Christ our Lord, and that after the consecration they are the true body of Christ - which was born of the Virgin and which hung on the Cross as an offering for the salvation of the world - and the true blood of Christ - which flowed from His side - and not just as a sign and by reason of the power of the sacrament, but in the very truth and reality of their substance and in what is proper to their nature. Amen.

Preparation & Training

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should receive sufficient spiritual, theological, and practical preparation to fulfill their role with knowledge and reverence. In all matters they should follow the guidance of the diocesan bishop.³

Those persons selected for this ministry are to be given an appropriate formation in the theology of the Eucharist based on the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Article 3, The Sacrament of the Eucharist, §1322-1419. Other recommended reading includes:

- *The Mystery and Worship of the Eucharist (Dominicae Cena)* by St. John Paul II
- *Instruction Concerning Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery (Inaestimabile Donum)* by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship
- *On the Eucharist in Its Relationship to the Church (Ecclesia de Eucharistia)* by St. John Paul II
- *The Eucharist: Our Sanctification* by Raniero Cantalamessa
- *The Lamb's Supper* by Scott Hahn

The instruction necessary for competency in this liturgical ministry should include:

³ *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds for the Dioceses of the United States of America*, NDRHC, no. 28).

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

- a. An adult understanding of the Eucharist in its historical, theological, liturgical, pastoral and spiritual dimensions;
- b. A knowledge about and an understanding of this particular liturgical ministry and its relationship to other liturgical roles within the celebration of Mass;
- c. Sufficient skills in the liturgical style of movement and, in particular, in the proper reverence in handling the Blessed Sacrament.
- d. Those ministering to the sick and homebound need: (1) formative education in the Church's attitude and teaching toward suffering and death; (2) training in ways to minister to those who are sick; (3) and familiarity with the Rite of Administration of Holy Communion to the Sick by an EMHC. Additionally, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering* by St. John Paul II should be consulted as primary sources for this formation.

Schedules

Schedules for EMHC are mailed to each EMHC by snail mail AND by email when an email if an address is known. Assigned EMHC are listed for the distribution of Communion to the homebound after the 8:00 a.m. Sunday Masses. Additional copies may be obtained from the parish office or EMHC may consult the current schedule posted in the sacristy.

EMHC should arrive early for any Mass or distribution of Holy Communion for which they are assigned.

Substitutes

If you are unable to report when assigned, please call other EMHC to find a substitute. If that fails, please call Fr. Cook and inform him that you are unable to assist.

Dress

All ministers of Holy Communion should show the greatest reverence for the Most Holy Eucharist by their demeanor, their attire, and the manner in which they handle the consecrated bread or wine. EMHC should come to Mass dressed in a respectful manner, even when they are not assigned to give Communion or bring Holy Communion to the sick and homebound, because they may be asked spontaneously to help in an emergency. EMHC should be aware of the great dignity they have been given to assist in the distribution of Holy Communion. Practically, this means:

- **Men:** Trousers, shirt with a collar, dress shoes, and optional tie and suit coat. No earrings or other bodily piercings are allowed for men.
- **Women:** Modest top (no midriffs, t-shirts, etc.), at least knee-length dress, skirt or pants, and dress shoes. No visible piercings are allowed except earrings.
- No t-shirts, shorts, or immodest clothing is allowed.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Disposition of Communicants

State of Grace

Communicants should be in a state of grace at the time of the reception of Holy Communion: “Those conscious of mortal sin, even though they think themselves to be contrite, must not go to the Holy Eucharist without sacramental confession beforehand.”⁴ This does not mean EMHC should interrogate communicants. Indeed, they should presume the communicant to be in a state of grace UNLESS the penitent him or herself makes manifest that they are not in a state of grace. If this is the case, please alert a priest at the parish so that he can visit the person.

One Hour Fasting

“Communicants are not to receive the Sacrament unless they have fasted for at least one hour from food and beverages, with the exception only of water and medicine”⁵ with one EXCEPTION: “The elderly and those suffering from any kind of infirmity, as well as those who take care of such persons, may receive the Eucharist even if they have taken something within the hour before Communion.”⁶

⁴ *Administration of Communion and Viaticum by an Extraordinary Minister from Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass*, USCCB (Washington D.C.: January, 2013), p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*

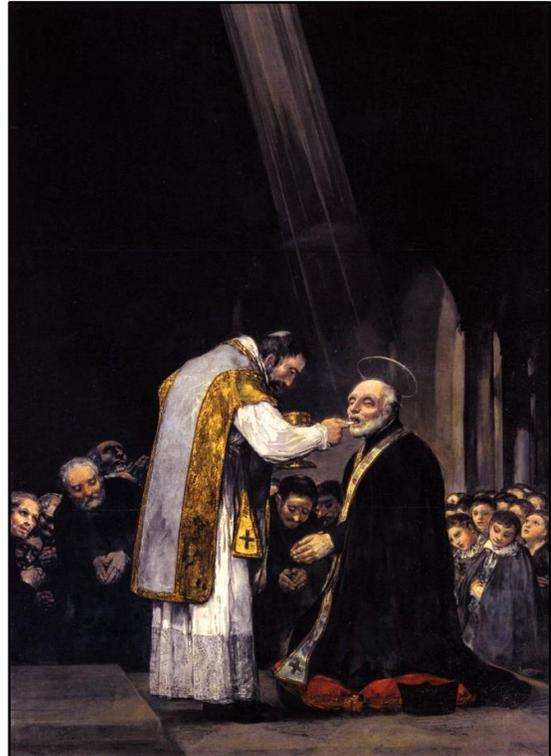
⁶ *Ibid*, p. 6.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Assisting in the Distribution of Communion at Mass

Approaching the Altar

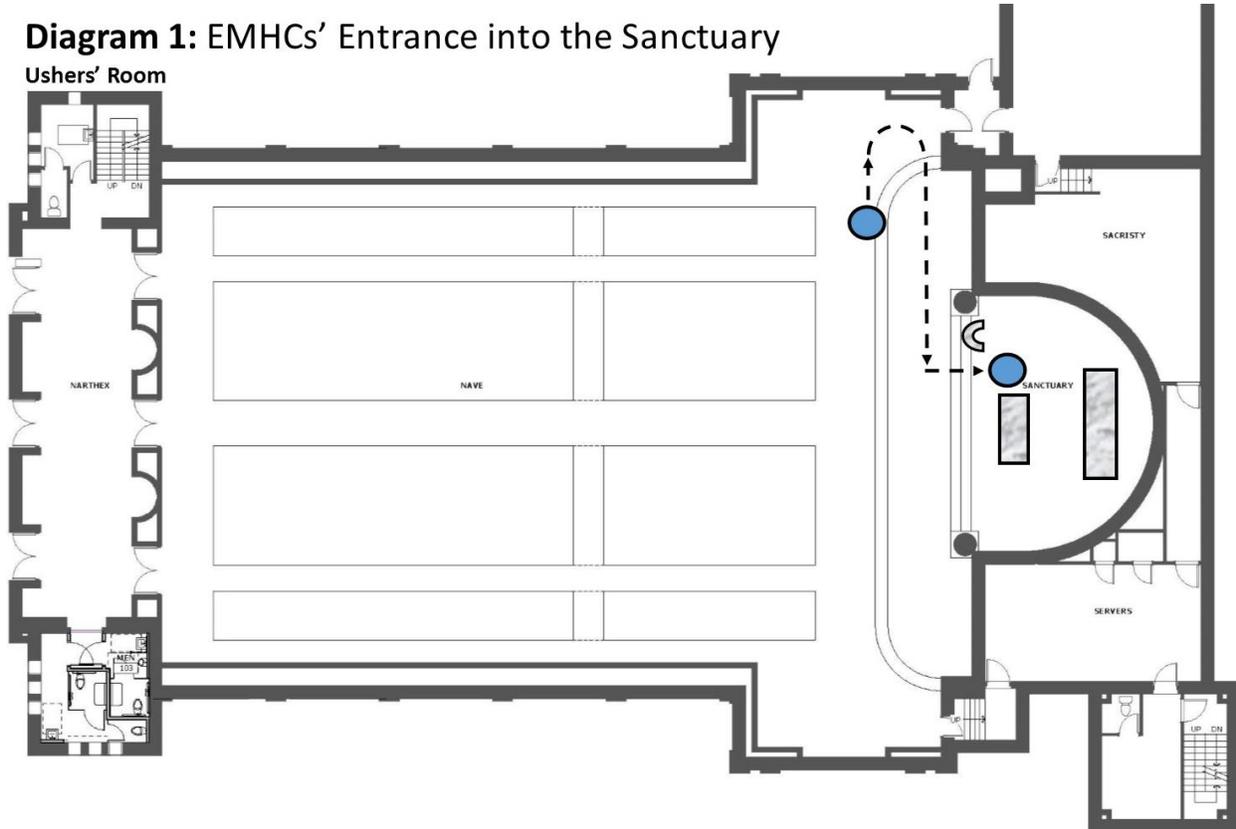
1. As the *Agnus Dei* or *Lamb of God* is begun, the Bishop or priest alone, or with the assistance of the deacon, and if necessary of concelebrating priests, breaks the Eucharistic bread. Other empty ciboria or patens are then brought to the altar if this is necessary. The deacon or priest places the consecrated bread in several ciboria or patens, if necessary, as required for the distribution of Holy Communion. If it is not possible to accomplish this distribution in a reasonable time, the celebrant may call upon the assistance of other deacons or concelebrating priests.
2. If Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are required by pastoral need, they should not approach the altar before the priest has received Communion. Rather, during the *Agnus Dei*, the Lamb of God, the EMHC assigned or asked to volunteer from the congregation to help with the distribution of Communion should leave his pew and kneel at the altar rail in front of the side altar with the statue of Mary.
 - a. **NOTE:** Occasionally an unexpected priest may concelebrate the Mass or come to assist in giving Communion or an unexpected Deacon may be present. We will do our best not to schedule an EMHC if we learn of this ahead of time, but, because priests and deacons are ordinary ministers of Holy Communion and, therefore, have the first priority in distributing Communion, the services of the EMHC may not be required if the clergy are present.
3. **After** the celebrant (and deacon) has received both the Body and the Blood, the EMHC walks around the west end of the altar rail and into the sanctuary. He or she stands to the west side of the altar waiting to receive Communion: "These ministers (EMHC) should not approach the altar before the Priest has received Communion."⁷ See **Diagram 1**.



⁷ GIRM 162.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Diagram 1: EMHCs' Entrance into the Sanctuary



4. EMHC receive Holy Communion in the customary fashion. A sign of reverence, a bow of the head, a solemn bow at the waist, or a genuflection should always precede the reception of Holy Communion, unless the communicant is already in a kneeling posture.
 - a. **NOTE:** Neither deacons nor lay ministers may ever receive Holy Communion in the manner of a concelebrating priest. The practice of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion waiting to receive Holy Communion until after the distribution of Holy Communion is not in accord with liturgical law.⁸

The Distribution of Holy Communion at Mass

1. After all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion have received the Eucharist, the bishop or priest reverently hands the ciborium (vessel which holds the Hosts) or additional chalices to the deacons or EMHC for distribution of Holy Communion to the people or to the choir.
 - a. **NOTE:** EMHC should never take the ciborium or chalice from the altar on their own initiative: "They (EMHC) are always to receive from the hands of the Priest Celebrant the vessel containing the species of the Most Holy Eucharist for distribution to the

⁸ NDRHC, 39; GIRM, 160.

⁹ THLS, 38.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

faithful.”¹⁰ If the priest and deacon forget to give the ciborium to the EMHC – yes, we forget things – the EMHC should kindly approach the priest to remind him.

- b. **NOTE:** Because our choirs deserve Holy Communion often an EMHC may be called upon to bring Communion to those in the choir loft. If this is the case, please bring Communion up to the choir loft immediately. The stairwell to the loft is located near the bathroom on the west side of the vestibule and the door; if the door is inadvertently locked, please enter the security code 1924 followed by the “unlock” button. The EMHC gives Communion to the choir and then returns as quickly as possible to the sanctuary. Upon returning the EMHC should also give Communion to any elderly or disabled people sitting in the specially reserved, short, front pews on the west (and east) sides.
2. If the EMHC is giving Communion to the people at the altar rail, he, accompanied by an altar boy with a paten, takes the ciborium down to the altar rail gates. He distributes the Body of Christ to those assembled on the west side of the altar rail. The altar boy will place a paten beneath the chin or hands of the communicant to collect any particles and the EMHC lifts up the Host and holds it a little above the eye level of the communicant and says: “The Body of Christ.”
 - a. **NOTE:** The proper and only permissible form for distributing Holy Communion is to offer the consecrated bread by saying, “The Body of Christ” (“Corpus Christi”; “El Cuerpo de Cristo”) and to offer the consecrated wine by saying, “The Blood of Christ” (“Sanguis Christi”; “La Sangre de Cristo”). No other words or names should be added; and the formula should not be edited in any way.¹¹
3. The communicant will respond, “Amen.” The EMHC then reverently places the host on the tongue or into the hands of the person: “If Communion is given only under the species of bread, the Priest raises the host slightly and shows it to each, saying, “The Body of Christ.” The communicant replies, “Amen,” and receives the Sacrament either on the tongue or, where this is allowed, in the hand, the choice lying with the communicant. As soon as the communicant receives the host, he or she consumes the whole of it.”¹²
 - a. **NOTE:** It is a person’s right to decide to receive by tongue or by hand so – whatever our personal preferences – EMHC should never show disgust or disdain at giving Communion in a way they personally do not like. EMHC should be vigilant as they approach each communicant to determine how he wishes to receive Communion. In general, if a communicant’s hands are together in a prayerful posture they will receive by tongue. If their hands are open, palms up, they will probably receive on the hand. However, it is cumbersome and undignified for a person holding a child to try to receive by hand. In such cases, the EMHC should inform the person in a very gentle way, “When with child, please receive Communion on the tongue.”
4. When the EMHC arrives at the west end of the altar rail he should cease giving Communion and walk back to the altar rail gate before resuming the distribution of Communion. Communion

¹⁰ GIRM 162.

¹¹ Cf. GIRM, 161; 284-287.

¹² GIRM 161.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

given at the altar rail is always given in one direction from left to right, from the point of view of the minister giving Communion. It is never given in a zigzag or back and forth way.

5. After all communicants receive Communion and if there is no third minister who has brought Communion to the Choir, the EMHC gives Communion to any elderly or infirm people that are seated in the specially-reserved, first short pews on the eastern or western sides of the church. Ask the priest about these people if you are unsure.
6. In those instances when there remains more consecrated wine than was necessary, if needs dictate, Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their cup of distribution with the permission of the diocesan bishop.

After Holy Communion

1. After everyone has received Communion the EMHC sets the ciborium or chalice to the west side of the altar or, better yet, hands it to the priest or deacon, if present. The EMHC genuflects to the Eucharist and then purifies his fingers with the special ablution bowl with the gold lid and the tiny finger towel provided in the west niche in the sanctuary. The sacred vessels are to be purified by the priest, the deacon or an instituted acolyte and **NEVER** by an EMHC.¹³ The amount of wine to be consecrated should be carefully measured before the celebration so that none remains afterward.
2. If after purifying his fingers the Eucharist is still on the altar and has not been returned to the tabernacle, the EMHC should wait and face the tabernacle until the Eucharist is reposed in the tabernacle and the tabernacle doors are closed. The EMHC genuflects toward the tabernacle at the same time as the priest and then returns to his pew. If in returning to his pew the EMHC passes again in front of the tabernacle he should also stop, face the tabernacle, and genuflect to the Eucharist inside.

Mishaps and Sacrilege

1. It is the duty of the EMHC to make sure the communicant has consumed the Host before returning to his pew. If a communicant walks away with the Host in his hands, the EMHC should stop the distribution of Communion and follow the person and kindly instruct him to consume the Eucharist at that moment.
2. If the Eucharistic bread or some particle of it falls it should be picked up reverently by the minister. The consecrated bread may be consumed or completely dissolved in water before being poured down the *sacrarium* in the sacristy. Should there be any mishap--as when, for example, the consecrated wine is spilled from the chalice--then the affected "area . . . should be washed and the water poured into the *sacrarium* [*GIRM*, 280]."¹⁴ In such a case the attending server should go get a purificator and place it over the spill. After Mass the EMHC should inform the celebrant about the incident so he can wash the area with water and pour that water down the *sacrarium*.

¹³ Congregatio Culto Divino et Disciplina Sacramentorum, Prot. n. 468/05/L Rome, 12 October 2006.

¹⁴ NDRHC, 29.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

3. **EMHC should never purify the sacred vessels;** moreover, it is strictly forbidden to pour the Precious Blood into the ground or into the *sacrarium*.¹⁵ Burying hosts or consecrated Eucharistic bread is strictly forbidden.

Prayers

1. **Anima Christi Prayer**

Soul of Christ, sanctify me.

Body of Christ, save me.

Blood of Christ, inebriate me.

Water from the side of Christ, wash me.

Passion of Christ, strengthen me.

O good Jesus, hear me.

Within Thy wounds, hide me.

Suffer me not to be separated from Thee.

From the malignant enemy, defend me.

And at the hour of my death, call me;

And bid me come to Thee,

That with Thy saints I may praise Thee forever and ever. Amen.

¹⁵ NDRHC, 51-55.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

Communion to the Homebound

When and Where

EMHC are very helpful when they bring Communion to our homebound. At St. Peter this is done after the 8:00 a.m. Sunday Mass. After the Mass the assigned EMHC should come to the sacristy. Lists of the homebound can be found on the table in the sacristy. The priest or deacon will go to the tabernacle and fill your pyx with the appropriate number of Hosts. If the priest and deacon are absent for a long period of time, please be patient – they will come. Pyxes with the Eucharist should always be kept in a pouch and carried visibly about the neck. Pyxes with the Eucharist should never be put in a pocket, purse, etc. In addition, once EMHC receive the Eucharist they should go immediately to give Communion to the homebound. EMHC should never take the Eucharist shopping or on errands, etc.

Official Rite

The EMHC visits the homebound and gives them Communion according to the approved rite of the Church.

Reception of Holy Communion

EMHC to the homebound should always first ask the communicant whether or not he can receive an entire Host or only a piece of the Host.

In the rare occasion that the communicant does not swallow the Eucharist or spits it up, the Eucharist, if visible, should be placed in water until it dissolves entirely. This can sometimes take days. The water is then poured down the *sacrarium* in the church or on open ground.

NOTE: For the sake of hygiene and care never put any Host in the special ablution bowls near the tabernacle or in the west niche. These ablution bowls are for purifying fingers, not for dissolving Hosts.

Afterwards

When the EMHC has completed his Communion run he should return any unused Eucharist to the priest in the sacristy for the priest to return them to the tabernacle. Because of the many Sunday morning Masses and security issues, the priest may not be present upon your return. We apologize for this. For now, however, please place the entire pyx with any unused Eucharist in the second tabernacle located in the back sacristy, close and lock the tabernacle door, and light the candle next to it. If the second tabernacle is unavailable please unfold a corporal on the wooden counter in the main, front sacristy and place the pyx in the center of it.

If there are no Hosts remaining in the pyx please place it in the plastic box that reads “Used Pyxes.”

If the sacristy door is locked when you return you can either wait patiently until the end of Mass or come to the rectory to see if a priest or money counter could let you into the sacristy. EMHC really

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

shouldn't consume any leftover Hosts themselves unless there is an emergency situation where Christ cannot be returned to the church tabernacle.

If the homebound or ill communicants give the EMHC their tithes to the parish, these may be placed in Fr. Cook's drawer in the sacristy.

Common Abuses

- It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to come forward in the Communion Procession with an open pyx and expect to have the Blessed Sacrament placed in their pyx, saying "I'll take one (or whatever number) please."
- It is a liturgical abuse for any priest, deacon or duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to place the Blessed Sacrament in a pyx held by any person in the Communion Procession.
- It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick to obtain the Blessed Sacrament from the Tabernacle before Mass and then remain at Mass with the Blessed Sacrament on his or her person.
- It is a liturgical abuse for any duly appointed Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion to the Sick, even though he or she receives the pyx containing the Blessed Sacrament at the proper time during Mass [or after Mass], to remain afterwards for any social gathering or meeting with the Blessed Sacrament on their person. The Blessed Sacrament is to be brought directly to the sick person.
- The practice of leaving the pyx, containing the Blessed Sacrament, on the altar for the Extraordinary Minister to pick up himself/herself is improper. The pyx is to be given to the minister by the priest or deacon.

Places & Things

- **Main Sacristy:** The sacristy is the place of the "holy things." It is in the sacristy that sacred vessels, vestments, etc., are kept.
 - **Schedule:** An up-to-date schedule of EMHC and Readers is posted in the sacristy.
 - **Pyxes & Pouches:** Pyxes along with their pouches are located in the drawer marked "pyxes". Pyxes are gold plated containers in which the Sacred Hosts are kept. Pyxes should always be carried in a pouch that is suspended about the neck.
 - **Clipboard:** The clipboard left in the sacristy contains the most updated list of homebound parishioners who receive Sunday morning Communion. Please be sure to write any corrections on the sheet and return it to the parish office.
 - **"Used Pyxes" Box:** Pyxes that do not have any Hosts or visible Eucharistic particles in them should be left in their pouches and placed in the container marked "Used Pyxes." Pyxes with Hosts still in them should either be returned to the second tabernacle in the back sacristy OR left on the sacristy counter upon an unfolded corporal.

Administration of Communion and Viaticum at Mass and to the Infirm by an Extraordinary Minister (EMHC)

- **Corporal:** A corporal is a white cloth that often folded into nine squares. It is unfolded like a placemat and sits beneath any vessels containing the Eucharist. Its purpose is to catch any particles of the *corpus*, Latin for body. Corporals are found in the drawer marked “Corporals.”
- **Second Sacristy:** The second or back sacristy is located on the northeast side of the church building.
 - **Second Tabernacle:** A second tabernacle is located in the back sacristy. When Mass is going on, EMHC who are returning with unused Hosts or pyxes filled with visible Eucharistic particles should place their pyxes and pouches into this tabernacle and light the sanctuary lamp, the candle nearby.
 - **Sanctuary Lamp:** A sanctuary lamp is any specially designated candle, usually white or red, that is located near a tabernacle and is when the Blessed Sacrament is in a given tabernacle.
- **Church**
 - **Tabernacle:** The tabernacle is located in the high altar of St. Peter Church. Because it houses the King of Kings, it is gold-plated and features two carved praying angels on the doors.

