

One Bread, One Body, One Spirit, One Mission

# Parish Life FOCUS

Communion Minister Training Supplement



## Five Tips for Communion Ministers

NICK WAGNER

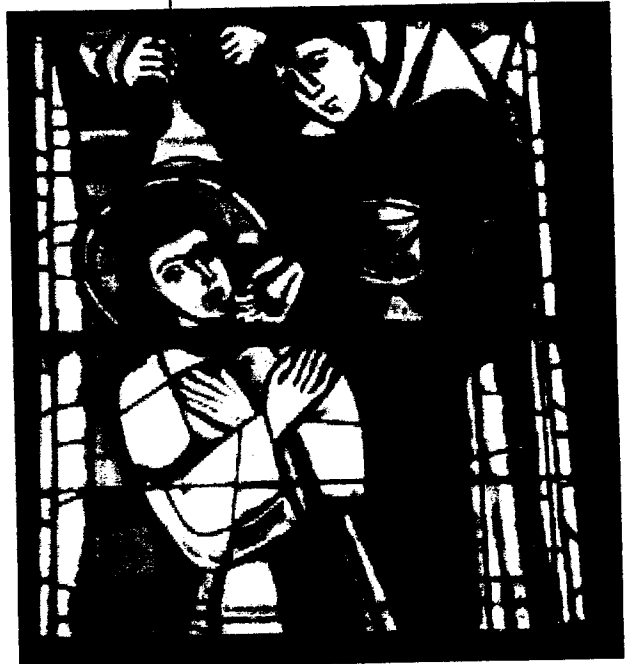
*The focus of our attention is the two aspects of the body and blood of Christ. That is, the consecrated bread and wine and the People of God who stand before us.*

Almost every Communion minister I've ever met strives for excellence. Most Communion ministers want to be the best they can be, and they put a lot of effort into doing their job well. These five suggestions will help Communion ministers who strive for excellence to refine their skills and become even better ministers.

**1. Focus on the right things.** For some ministers, when we get near the tabernacle or the altar we tend to lose focus. Maybe we're nervous that people are watching us, or maybe we're worried about getting the wrong vessel or going to the wrong station. These are not the things to focus on. The focus of our attention is the two aspects of the Body and blood of Christ. That is, the consecrated bread and wine and the People of God who stand before us. Try to minimize all other distractions and focus on the interaction of the Holy Spirit, through you, with each person who comes forward for Communion.



**2. Smile.** This seems like such a trivial thing, and it is so important. It might even be considered an act of revelation. The liturgy, as you know, is two parts: Word and Eucharist. The Word is the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist is a direct response to that Good News. Communion should look and feel as if we've just heard Good News. So Communion ministers need to work hard at presenting a pleasant and



inviting smile, a smile that reveals God's loving face to each communicant.



**3. Be a team player.** The more ministers assigned to a given Mass, the more flexible you have to be. Some Sunday, one of your fellow Communion ministers is going to wind up in the wrong place. Or the visiting presider will mix up the routine. Or the assigned minister will forget to take Communion to the choir. If all the Communion ministers take responsibility for looking out for each other and working together, these minor difficulties will be completely unnoticed by the assembly. But if, as sometimes happens, we let inconveniences fluster and frustrate us, the ritual will be even further disrupted. An easy and relaxed attitude helps everyone on the team do their job better.



**4. Say, "The body (blood) of Christ."** Don't add "This is..." to the front of the statement. And don't say the person's name. Even if you know a lot of names of the parishioners, you probably don't know all of them. If you address the person in front of me by name, and then fail to call me by my name, I might feel a little like an outsider. Treat everyone with equal hospitality. If you want to create a sense of intimacy and friendship, look each person directly in the eye and make sure your hand touches theirs when you share Communion with them.



**5. Take your time.** Communion is a moment of profound sharing. Let that moment linger with each person, sharing as much of yourself as possible in that brief moment. Don't rush as though you've got a pressing engagement somewhere else. If there are a great number of communicants and time is usually short, the solution is to add more ministers and not hurry past this important moment in the liturgy.



Choose one of these goals to work on throughout the next liturgical season. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 on how you think you're doing at the beginning of the season and how you think you're doing at the end. If you've improved on your goal by the end of the season, move on to another for the next season. Ministers who strive for excellence are never finished striving. They just move on to different goals. +

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## What the Body Learns in Communion

DIANA MACALINTAL

In Communion, the body walks, sings, bows, responds, takes, eats, drinks and stands. What do these actions teach us about Communion?

### Walking

The sacred action of walking teaches us unity, mission and commitment. Our ritual procession to the altar is different from a stroll in the park or a line at a grocery store. It recalls the commitment of the Israelites in their pilgrimage to the land of milk and honey, the power of Joshua's march around Jericho that toppled its walls and Jesus' selfless procession to Jerusalem and his ultimate death.

### Singing

Singing during Communion teaches solidarity and joy because "its purpose is to express the communicants' union in spirit by means of the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight more clearly the 'communitarian' nature of the procession to receive Communion" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 86). In a sense, refusing to sing is a refusal to learn the meaning of Communion itself.

### Standing

Standing forces our bodies to see and stay engaged with the Christ hidden in uncomfortable places — the poor, the different-from-me, the imperfect other. Standing throughout Communion trains us not to be satisfied until all the hungry are fed. +

## Dress the Part

EMILY J. BESL

**W**hen someone is in the market for a new job or looking for advancement in their current employment, a number of tasks require attention: preparing a resume, sharpening interview skills, compiling references. One crucial consideration, according to experts, is the person's way of dressing.



BILL WITMAN

*Most of us have an underlying conviction that image counts.*

**Why is apparel important?** Most of us have an underlying conviction that image counts. "Your work attire reflects on you and your professionalism," maintains one career advisor. While some people may debate this, arguing for substance over appearance, or content over looks, studies on the power of nonverbal communication support the consultants' stress on the importance of clothing in the business world.

**Isn't this also true in the world of worship?** Certainly, special clothing for ordained ministers has been the practice throughout most of Christianity. As Catholics, we have been accustomed to liturgical vestments for bishops, priests

and deacons, as well as albs for altar servers or robes for choir members. When additional lay liturgical ministries emerged after Vatican II, the question of appropriate dress for them came too.

**What, for instance, is the proper clothing for Communion ministers?**

As might be expected, liturgical documents written for the many cultures of the worldwide church do not contain very detailed directives about what Communion ministers should wear. Official guidelines allow for liturgical garb such as an alb or for other appropriate clothing. When Rome opened this ministry to the laity in 1973, a rite for commissioning Communion ministers indicated that they should wear "either the liturgical vestment in use locally or clothing befitting this sacred ministry." In a similar vein, the current edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002) includes an adaptation



for the United States that indicates that "lay ministers may wear the alb or other suitable vesture or other appropriate and dignified clothing" (339).

American norms for Communion under both kinds from 2001 places the subject of clothing in the context of demonstrating reverence for the Eucharist: "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."

Like the image consultants, this document stresses the importance of clothing, not for the quality of clothing in itself, but because of what it communicates. For Communion ministers, it is essential to convey reverence. Those who dress too casually may in fact possess a deep faith in this sacramental reality, but their outward appearance is not a full expression of it.

Whether we intend it or not, we communicate by our manner of clothing. This is especially true in the liturgy, where outward signs are the means of God's grace and of our acceptance of that grace. Our clothing on the outside is a sign of attitudes and beliefs on the inside.

Besides conveying reverence for the Eucharist, Communion ministers should dress in a way that communicates the sacredness of the whole action of the Mass. Their attire indicates the importance of what is taking place. Especially in a ministry that emphasizes unity of the church as Christ's body, Communion ministers need to dress not for themselves but for the communities they serve. Choice of apparel would depend not on personal mood or comfort or convenience, but on the sacred liturgy to be celebrated and the community celebrating.

**What should lay Communion ministers wear?** Standards will obviously differ in different regions. Perhaps appropriate dress would look more like going out to dinner or the theater on a special occasion and less like heading for a picnic or ball game. Even without precise norms, Communion ministers can ask what their clothing selection communicates. Does it project a sense of reverence? Is my attire "appropriate and dignified" and "befitting this sacred ministry?"

"An image that is credible or congruent with what you do is important. You should communicate through your image that you are believable for the business you are in," say career consultants. Good advice as well for those in the business of ministering holy Communion.

**Why should Communion ministers be concerned about how they dress?**

- Image counts.
- Dressing well is befitting of this sacred ministry.
- Dressing well demonstrates reverence.
- Clothing conveys values.
- You communicate through appearance.

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## RESOURCES for Communion Ministers

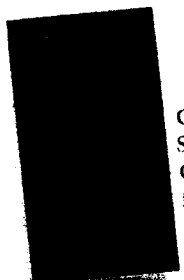
EILEEN PONDER



**Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum** from Catholic Book Publishing Co. contains all the rites, their introductions and notes as well as the extensive listing of scripture passages appropriate to celebrating the rites of the sick. It is an essential reference book, even if you choose to use a pocket-size version of the Communion rite when you visit the sick.



**Handbook for Ministers of Care** from Liturgy Training Publications is a thorough and easy-to-read guidebook. It addresses the pastoral and liturgical skills needed in this ministry and offers helpful suggestions on structuring the ministry.



**Administration of Communion to the Sick and Pastoral Care of the Dying** from the USCCB. These are pocket sized, well-crafted versions of the rites, useful when taking Communion to the sick or praying with someone in danger of death. +

## What We Hand On

EILEEN M. PONDER

I was absolutely bowled over the first time I served as a Communion minister. I agreed to do it because help was needed and somebody asked me to. I never felt called to it or even really thought about it much. It looked simple enough, and I had been trained of course. But my training was mostly about how not to spill the cup and all manner of hygienic things. Nobody mentioned that I might be thoroughly undone by those few sacred minutes of handing the Body of Christ to the Body of Christ. No one told me that emotionally and spiritually I might never be the same, that I might cross over into a sacred abyss of utter mystery, that I might not ever be coming back, and that I would very likely slam right into the hands and face and gentle whisper of God.

Hands touch hands, eyes meet eyes, and human voices call and respond when we receive Communion. It is an amazingly intimate, even startling encounter with the living God. I never expected that at the beginning, but now I do. While I distribute Holy Communion, whether bread or cup, I am humbled time and again by the magnitude of those minutes and the depth of faith in a savior who comes to us in a morsel of bread and taste of wine.

It is for me delightful and demanding, life-sustaining and pretense-shattering. I am stripped bare, washed clean and made new by the power of Christ present in bread and wine and dwelling in my fellow pilgrims.

We hand on a lot when we celebrate Eucharist: the discipline of worship, stories of the Bible, the doctrines, traditions and practices of our church. Most importantly, we hand on the art of loving sacrifice. The eucharistic sacrifice is not one of expiation, of Christ somehow correcting our sinfulness by his death. It is rather a sacrifice of love, of offering oneself completely for the sake of freeing others. Christ gave, and continues to give, his life so that we might be freed from sin, the anti-love. He gave his life not to pay for our sins, but so that we might make our own the saving power of loving sacrifice, a power that overcomes even death. This is the Paschal Mystery. Like all mystery it is not unknowable, but infinitely knowable.

We know the Paschal Mystery in the loving relationships that sustain us. We know it each time someone sacrifices a piece of what is hers or his so that we can be freed from worry, injustice, hunger, illness, sorrow or a thousand other longings that bind us. We know the Paschal Mystery each time we give up something for the sake of another, give up a



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Click on the question below to go to the online answer page.

*How many people are required for a service of exposition of the Blessed Sacrament?*

*If I go to a wedding Mass on Saturday, does that count for Sunday?*

*How many times in one day may someone share in Communion?*

*Should Communion ministers sing during Communion?*

*Can divorced people be Communion ministers?*

*Does Lent end on Holy Thursday or on Easter Sunday?*

*What is the minimum age to become a lector or Communion minister?*

*When should the Communion song actually begin?*

*How do we clean the Communion vessels after Mass?*

*What parts of the Mass must always be sung by the assembly?*

*When should the assembly begin singing the "Lamb of God"?*

*Can a lector also serve as a Communion minister?*

Got a question about the role of Eucharistic ministers, the Mass or your ministry?

Sign on to the *Parish Life* Question Board and post your question there.

bit of who we are or what we possess so that someone else might be more free from sin or sorrow.

As hands extend toward you to receive the one you offer in Holy Communion, bow down in humble recognition of the love stories those hands bear. Human lives and human hands, stretched out before you to welcome Christ, bear the good news of our salvation. They bear countless stories of loving sacrifice, of lives poured out, of life from death. They bear mystery — a deep abyss of sacred, startling, even frightening love. They bear the living God who comes to rescue us from all that is not love.

Look at the hands presented to you. They are young and old, black, white and brown. Some are sure and steady while others tremble and are stiffened with age. Some are strong with leathery skin; others are soft and well-groomed. There are small hands, weak hands, and cracked, dried, bleeding hands. There are eager hands and timid ones, clean and dirty, bony and pudgy hands — everybody's there. Look at the people, touch their hands, see their eyes, and hear their "Amen's." As you hand the body and blood of Christ to the body of Christ, allow yourself to be stripped bare, washed clean and made new by the lives of loving sacrifice laid out before you. Embrace the mystery handed to you in those few sacred minutes. I hope that you cross over to a new place and slam right into the hands and face and gentle whisper of God. And I hope for your sake that you never come back. +

## Saving Cup

EILEEN PONDER

The intimacy we express in sharing Communion from the cup is really quite radical. We are claiming in this simple gesture to be unafraid of one another, bound together with Christ in sacrifice, in a holy pouring out of the entirety of our lives. We pour out our lives in order to invite the rest of humanity into the reign of God. It is this reign that the whole of the eucharistic liturgy expresses. The reign of God is characterized by love and kindness, by compassion and justice and peace. It is marked by unselfish giving and gracious hospitality. The reign of God saves us from all that is empty and isolated and void of rejoicing.

Graciously receiving and drinking from the saving cup reminds us who we are: children of God charged with nothing less than being Christ's presence in the world, calling all people to live in justice and peace and endless love. +

## From the Same Sacrifice

ROBERT FEDUCCIA

Debate is nothing new in theological circles. Since the early centuries, Christians have argued over the nature of Christ, the nature of the church and the nature of the papacy. Among all the debates in the church, arguments over the eucharistic liturgy are the ones most likely to involve the laity and stir their passions. Very simply, this is where Catholics' faith is expressed and experienced. Arguments over the liturgy move from the realm of theory into the realm of experience.

Recently, the Vatican has issued three documents that are intended to answer some of the current liturgical debates: *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Among the issues addressed is the distribution of holy Communion. In *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, the church reminds us of what has been taught since the Second Vatican Council, namely this:

"So that even by means of the signs of Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the Sacrifice being celebrated," it is preferable that the faithful be able to receive hosts consecrated in the same Mass. (Instruction on the Eucharist: *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 89)

In practical terms, the church is asking for us *not* to distribute holy Communion that is reserved in the tabernacle. The universal church is asking that the faithful receive holy Communion that has been offered and consecrated at that particular Mass. But why? Isn't the body of Christ, the body of Christ? We believe in transubstantiation. The presence of Christ doesn't leave the host after Mass. Why should be concerned about when or where it was consecrated? The answers to these questions are found in the quote itself.

St. Augustine was and is a giant in expressing Catholic faith. Many find his eucharistic theology to be particularly poignant.

...[T]he whole redeemed city, that is to say, the congregation or community of the saints, is offered to God as our sacrifice through the great High Priest, who offered himself to God in his passion for us, that we might be members of this glorious head. ... This is the sacrifice of Christians: we, being many, are one

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ALEJANDRO ALVAREZ

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body in Christ. And this also is the sacrifice which the church continually celebrates in the sacrament of the altar, known to the faithful, in which she teaches that she herself is offered in the offering she makes to God. (*The City of God*: Book X, Chapter 6)

At the Second Vatican Council, the church said that lay persons have a priestly role at the Eucharist. A priest is one who offers sacrifice. It is not the Mass of the ordained only. It is our Mass. It is not only the sacrifice of the ordained that is offered; it is ours as well. St. Augustine is saying that at the eucharistic liturgy, we offer our sacrifice to Jesus Christ.

What do we offer? What do we join to Jesus? Everything! *Lumen Gentium* from the Second Vatican Council says:

For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne — all these become 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.' Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. (34)

We offer all that we are. As a priestly people, we come to the Eucharist with hopes and fears, joys and worries, our work and our play, family and friends and join ourselves to Jesus the Christ. These are united to Jesus in the eucharistic elements and create a single offering of worship to the Father. He sees one thing: the whole body of Christ united in a single act of love, adoration and worship. The bread and wine that is offered are symbols of your life, and they contain your life. They should be received to give you life. In order to point to this reality, the faithful should receive back from God the very offering that they made.

The Eucharist is filled with subtle symbols. Many of these subtleties are often lost. This is one that must be preserved.

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