

A Handbook for Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

God of Glory, your beloved Son has shown us that true worship comes from humble and contrite hearts. Bless our brothers and sisters, who have responded to the needs of our parish and wish to commit themselves to your service. Grant that their ministry may be fruitful and our worship pleasing in your sight. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen. With thanks to

<http://www.thesacredheart.com/>

We hope you will find this Handbook helpful as you join us in our effort to create liturgies that are saturated with the Real Presence of Christ.

A Theology of Real Presence

Saint Bridget Catholic Church is committed to doing all that we can do to make sure that an encounter with the parish is an encounter with Christ, really present, here and now. This Real Presence is most acutely acknowledged as occurring when we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. It is our intention that all who gather know Christ's Real Presence. To that end, Liturgy Ministers intend to do all they can to mediate that reality to all who have gathered to celebrate the Eucharist.

Often those who attend Mass without a role that requires them to have a schedule believe that they are not responsible for the liturgy's quality, power or effectiveness. The Church does not see it that way. The assembly is the largest Liturgy Minister and powerfully responsible for mediating Christ's Real Presence.

Christ told us that where two or three are gathered together in His name, He is there (Mt. 18:20). The Roman Catholic Church takes this promise quite seriously, going so far as to proclaim that in the assembly gathered for worship, one of Christ's Real Presences is known. Fr. Mark Curesky of Saint John parish in Cromwell, CT provides insight into the implications of this belief when he says: "Something we seldom think about is the Real Presence of Jesus in us, the **congregation**. We are more than a crowd or an audience but rather an assembly, a gathering of believers, who have been called by the Lord to worship in His Presence. If we were to be asked when the Mass begins, we would have to say in the parking lot of the church! When the first two Catholics greet one another, the Mass has begun. Jesus taught that when two or three are gathered in His name, He is there present. There are more than two or three present for Mass each weekend. When we recognize this Presence of the Lord, we begin to see each other in a new way which demands our attention and respect. We are called to be aware of the people around us who believe as we do and have gathered with us to worship our God. After all, our

congregation is a community, that is a “common unity”, in Jesus Christ. Our awareness of one another means that we see Jesus in one another and that we are called to show hospitality. We are called to make others feel welcomed, especially the stranger, and to be attentive to the needs of others around us. Our presence is important to the community because it is not complete if we are missing, and through our actions we assist others in their worship.”¹ Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are, first and foremost, members of the assembly and so share in this important ministry throughout the liturgy. What follows are the more specific perspectives and tasks associated with the ministry of Lay Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion.

A Theology of Lay Liturgical Ministry

“But you are a ‘chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises’ of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1Pt. 2:9).

All who serve in the orderly and faithful celebration of the Eucharist are baptized members of the Body of Christ, baptized priest, prophet and king. All of these Liturgy Ministers have both the right and the privilege to participate in the ministry of Christ. Participating in the ministry of Christ leads us to bring Him into our homes, neighborhoods and workplaces. It also leads the faithful, by virtue of their baptism, to bring His Real Presence to the liturgy. The General Instruction of the Roman Missal tells us that the most fundamental expression of our lay ministry is the “conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of Christ.”² Being in service to the greatest prayer of the Church is indeed a privilege. The celebration of the Eucharist is the “action of the whole Church”³ and as such, everyone in the assembly has an “individual right and duty to contribute their participation.”⁴ The first and foremost duty belongs to the assembly. We who do not hold specific designated roles must still take seriously our role as members of the assembly responsible for revealing Christ’s Real Presence in the Eucharist. Those with specific designated roles as Liturgy Ministers have the right and the duty to fulfill their ministries with grace and competence. The diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches the Eucharistic celebrations and assists us in our prayer. “Starting from Vatican II, the Church has continually drawn more people to participate in her activities. In liturgical celebrations, the faithful ‘should not be there as strangers or silent spectators; on the

1 Fr. Mark L. Curesky in a bulletin excerpt on Real Presence. See <http://www.saintjohn-cromwell.org/> Accessed 2/25/11.

2 General Instruction of the Roman Missal. Introduction #5.

3 Ibid.

4 GIRM Chapter 111, #58.

contrary, through a good understanding of the rites and prayers they should take part in the sacred action conscious of what they are doing, with devotion and full collaboration.”⁵ This is even more the case for those of you God has called to the designated service of the liturgy as Liturgy Ministers.

A Spirituality of Lay Liturgical Ministry

- **Liturgy Ministry flows from baptism.** This means that Liturgy Ministers, including members of the assembly, should spend time more deeply understanding and living the promises of baptism and the profession of faith.
- **Liturgy Ministry is a response to a call from God.** If you are reading this, you are either sure God has called you to this work or you are discerning if God is calling you. In either case, when God calls us to service, God is also calling us to integrate our spiritual lives with our daily lives. There are a number of actions you might take to give outward signs of your integrated life in Christ. This witness to an integrated faith life may be done by arranging for time off from work and/or school for religious observances such as Ash Wednesday or Triduum liturgies. Witness to your faith might also include fasting consistently throughout Lent. Another way to witness to your faith may be by keeping the season of anxious anticipation that is Advent and not giving over the season of Advent to the merchant-driven Christmas model. Saint John Chrysostom suggested we might approach this integrated life in Christ this way:

Be pure and intent of heart, bent on him, the holy One,

who has called you;

—be holy in all you do.

I am your own God, your Lord;

be holy for I am holy.

—Be holy in all you do. ⁶

⁵ Sacrosanctum Concilium, #48 in “Liturgy for the People”

<http://sacredliturgy.blogspot.com/2007/07/manifestations-of-lay-liturgical.html> Accessed 2/25/11.

⁶ Saint John Chrysostom. Adapted from the Office of Readings from the “Common of Holy Man” in Cole, Donna M. Liturgical Ministry: A Practical Guide to Spirituality. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1996. E-book. p.12.

Liturgy Ministry calls for a personalized spirituality. God is many and varied. God made us in God's own image and that means that we too are many and varied. The corollary to that is that our spirits grow and change, our hearts are enlarged and our lives are molded into Christ's life, taking paths that are unique to us. What is not personal or individual is the outcome: dynamic living faith, a faith like Jesus Christ's. A faith like Jesus' is characterized by the actions of questioning and self-examining. Donna Cole says it this way, "Ministry is neither a beginning nor an end but rather a timeless component of our communal journey of faith. Before we commit to serving in a liturgical sense, we must first commit to lives of questioning, examining the motivations and desires of our hearts, for the life of a minister of Christ is one of dynamic, living faith. As we begin to function in service to the liturgy, which defines our identity as Catholic Christians, it is essential for us to scrutinize the way we live and worship." ⁷

Liturgy Ministry is nurtured through prayer. "To serve the people of God we must first be open to the power of the Spirit working in us and among us and be unafraid to listen in the stillness of prayer." ⁸ For Liturgy Ministers, this means embracing prayer forms in your personal prayer that link you directly to elements of the Eucharist in general and to your particular area of service in particular. In this way you integrate your spiritual life so that your prayer outside of Mass will strengthen the prayer and service you give within it. Remember, this is integral to developing a spirituality that will create in you the difference between someone doing a job at Mass and someone serving God's people in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The Basic Requirements to Serve in Liturgical Ministry at Saint Bridget

Liturgy Ministers are called by God to be instruments of Christ's Real Presence. Discerning this call to serve at Saint Bridget has four steps. The first step in this discernment asks potential Liturgy Ministers to examine how their gifts of time and talent can best be shared, being sure to examine the skills, preparation and time commitment of a potential liturgical ministry. Once this initial discernment is complete and a potential minister presents themselves for service, the second step is that they will be invited to attend the required theological and practical training for their specific ministry choice. The third step in preparation for Liturgy Ministry is commissioning by the Pastor. The final step in serving as a Liturgy Minister is to attend to ongoing growth in the ministry through prayer, study and attendance at events in the parish and beyond.

⁷ Cole, Donna M. Liturgical Ministry: A Practical Guide to Spirituality. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1996. Ebook.

⁸ Ibid. p. 7

General Qualifications for all Liturgy Ministers

- Liturgy Ministers live according to the law of Christ and the Church. (GIRM 101) At Saint Bridget this means:
 - o Liturgy Ministers must be registered and active members in the parish. Active parishioners are those who contribute time, talent and/or financial support to the work of the parish on a regular basis.
 - o Liturgy Ministers must be fully initiated Catholics in good standing. That means they have received the Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation (with the exception of Altar Servers who do NOT have to be confirmed to serve), and participate faithfully in the celebration of the Eucharist. Liturgy ministers live their lives in such a way that their love for the Mass is evident by their regular active participation in it.
 - o If married, Liturgy Ministers must be in a valid marriage. A valid Catholic marriage results from four elements: the spouses are free to marry and they freely exchange consent; they intend to marry for life; they are open to bearing children; their wedding takes place in the presence of two witnesses and before a properly authorized priest or deacon. Exceptions to the last requirement must be approved by Church authority. (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.) If single, a Liturgy Ministers' life must be led according to the values of the Church. Singles wishing to serve as a Liturgy Minister must not be engaged in any activities that would diminish the possibility of Christ being known to be present in and through them when they serve at the Lord's banquet.
- **Liturgy Ministers are formed and trained for their ministry. (GIRM 101) At Saint Bridget, this means:**
 - o Liturgy Ministers must attend both initial and ongoing formation and training in accordance with the schedule given to them. These sessions are intended to help ministers model Christ's life in which He prayed, studied, taught others and shared the action of God with others. In following in His footsteps, everyone will be expected to attend ongoing formation and training.
 - o Parishioners already serving in the Liturgy Ministry of the parish must attend an initial liturgy formation event that we call Ministry Matters. As Jesus welcomed opportunities to gather with those who loved Him and as Jesus welcomed chances to both teach and learn, so we wish to model that here at Saint Bridget.

- **Liturgy Ministers reveal Christ to those they serve. At Saint Bridget, this means:**

- o When scheduled to serve as a Liturgy Minister, care should be taken with appearance. Nothing should be worn that calls attention to the minister, for the minister's role is to mediate Christ really present. As guests at the Lord's Table, we want to come portraying ourselves as prepared and honored to serve.

1. To give this outward sign here at Saint Bridget, we ask that Liturgy Ministers dress in business attire: jackets and ties for gentlemen and conservative apparel for women.
2. Hair, accessories and make-up should all be simple, neat, and without national flair (e.g. clothing with writing on it, buttons like "Kiss me, I'm Irish", or jewelry or clothing that indicates a national affiliation.)
3. Shoes should allow the minister to move quietly and reverently, and also should not call attention to themselves (e.g., athletic shoes, shoes with sparkles, flashing lights, rollers, or exceedingly high heels.)

- o When scheduled to serves as a Liturgy Minister, care should be taken with preparation, arrival and prayer. This handbook gives the vision for each of these areas. Liturgy Ministers should remember that they are the hands and feet of Christ, both host and guest at the banquet, and their actions should mediate that. At Saint Bridget, all Liturgy Ministers are ministers of hospitality and of the Real Presence of Christ from the moment they arrive.

- o Because each Liturgy Minister is a sign of Christ's Real Presence and therefore needs to come having prepared and prayed, it is not ideal to have to ask people to serve at the last minute. This is why if you cannot serve when scheduled, it is **imperative** that you get a substitute well enough in advance so that they might prepare and pray. Of course, in case of an emergency, Christ's Spirit will imbue a last-minute substitute with His presence and the liturgy will be served. However, we are working toward liturgies that are saturated with Christ's Real Presence, and so are trying to move away from anything that is last minute, unprepared and being done without prayer. We want all who come to worship to find us prepared, practiced and prayed so that it is Christ who welcomes them, nourishes them and sends them forth: Christ working through us.

- **Liturgy Ministers are supported by the Liturgy Committee and the Pastoral Staff. At Saint Bridget this means:**

- o If you have an idea of a way that we can further work toward the value of all who celebrate liturgy at Saint Bridget knowing they have been in the Real Presence of Christ, please offer that idea to any member of the Liturgy Committee by contacting them using the contact list on the website: <http://saintbridgetchurch.org>
- o You will be commissioned upon beginning your ministry and prayed for regularly throughout your term of service. Your ministry will be supported by information about the ways in which you can continue to learn and grow in grace and competence on your own through websites, online courses, webcasts, podcasts, and articles.
- o If you are having difficulty carrying out your ministry, a member of the Liturgy Committee or the Pastoral Staff will be available to meet with you to help you either overcome the difficulty or discern a different place to serve within the community.
- o If you have any questions or concerns about this ministry as you are carrying it out or as you are experiencing it carried out by others, you can always contact the Ministry Coordinator for the area of concern using the contact list on the website <http://saintbridgetchurch.org>
- o If you would like some assistance in understanding either the theological or the practical elements of your ministry, you can get it from mentors, Liturgy Committee members and the Pastoral Staff, all of whom will be happy to assist you.
- o If you are new to Saint Bridget, have served as a Liturgy Minister elsewhere and would like to do so here, the Liturgy Committee Chair will be happy to assist you in entering into the ministry of Christ's Real Presence here.
- o If you would like to serve as a support to your fellow Liturgy Ministers by working with or serving on the Liturgy Committee, please contact the Liturgy Committee Chair using the contact information on the website at <http://saintbridgetchurch.org>

A Position Description for the Lay Liturgical Ministry of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

A. Basic Requirements

1. A proper understanding of Christ's Real Presence in consecrated bread and wine. A proper understanding includes that you:

- a. Have received recent education in the Church's teaching about this Mystery;
- b. Have the ability to articulate the Church's teaching about Real Presence;
- c. Have an understanding of the liturgical postures and gestures that convey reverence for the Real Presence of Christ in consecrated bread and wine;
- d. Have the following spiritual dispositions and/or the willingness to work to develop them:

- i. Humility: while it is a great honor to be chosen to serve in this ministry, the honor is received with the humility of Christ, who did not deem equality with God something to be presumed, but rather chose to empty Himself and serve others, as a slave.

- ii. Radical hospitality: All who come to liturgy are God's privileged guests. It is the responsibility of those who serve at the banquet to offer to all this magnificent hospitality. It is also the responsibility of those who serve at the banquet to be willing and prepared to take the Eucharist to those who were unable to come into the assembly: the sick, the shut-in, the elderly, and the injured.

- iii. Gratitude: Eucharist means thanksgiving, and those who serve at the Eucharist are called to possess deeply grateful spirits, lifestyles and language while gathered with the Body of Christ and while living their daily lives.

- iv. Reverence: Ministers of Holy Communion are the teachers of reverence. As such, the same reverence given to the Body and Blood of Christ is offered also to the assembly, the lectors and the presider as they too mediate Christ, really present.

2. Time to engage in adequate remote and proximate preparation to serve. Adequate remote and proximate preparation includes the following:

- a. For remote preparation (that is during the week prior to serving and at other times), a Liturgy Minister will

- i. Have at least one hour during the week to pray for the people of Saint Bridget, for the needs of the community and for the openness of your spirit that Christ may flow through you;

- ii. Participate in all gathered and self-directed formation for Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion or for Liturgy Ministers as a group.

- b. For proximate preparation, which is the preparation immediately preceding service to the liturgy, a Liturgy Minister will

- i. Have at least 1.5 hours to give to the celebration of the Eucharist. Please allow for a longer time if you are also going to take the Eucharist to someone who was not able to gather.

- ii. Prepare to celebrate the Mass by reading the scriptures and by praying for the ministry.

- iii. Be part of a fully conscious and active assembly.

- c. For attention to liturgical movement, a Lay Extraordinary Ministry of Holy Communion will:

- i. Have the ability to move from where you are seated to the area of preparation and then to the area of service to the community.

- ii. Have the ability to handle the plate, the consecrated host, the chalice and the purificator securely and reverently.

- iii. Be willing to talk with a member of the Liturgy Committee if you have mobility concerns or limitations. Together you can discuss the issues of Christ's Real Presence clearly mediated and of your safety and the safety of others to arrive at a decision regarding mobility and ministry.

B. Special Requirements

- a. Saint Bridget has many Masses each weekend. Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are asked to be willing to be scheduled at more than one Mass time. This will not happen on the same weekend.

- b. Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the highest holy days of the Triduum, Easter Sunday, and Christmas and those who serve on Holy Days of obligation are gathered by first come, first served sign-ups. The same preparation is required; however, Eucharistic Ministers serving during the Triduum, Easter and Christmas will need to allot two to two and a half hours to serve and may be asked to attend a special training for the liturgies for which they have agreed to serve.

Formation and Training Requirements for the Liturgical Ministry of Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

A. Eucharistic Minister Training/Formation should be held two or three times a year. The dates for upcoming training can be found on the Saint Bridget website at <https://saintbridgetchurch.org/Ministries/Liturgical-Ministry/Called-to-Serve-Formation>

a. If you have served as a Eucharistic Minister in another faith community and would like to serve now, here at Saint Bridget's, please contact the Liturgy Committee Chair, whose contact information can be found on the website. Together you will agree upon your initial formation and scheduling.

b. Each new Eucharistic Minister is assigned a mentor who will provide the following services:

i. Explanations and modeling of what is expected.

ii. Assistance with the sacristy routines.

iii. Coaching to help the embrace of the significance of the role of Christ really present to us when the Eucharistic Minister shares the precious Body and Blood of the Lord.

c. Upon completion of the initial formation and prior to commissioning, Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will be eligible to serve the assembly's prayer in this role. However, ideally ministers will follow this four-step process leading to service: discernment, formation and training, commissioning and then scheduling/service. Please make every effort to avail yourself of this order of training. Feel free to talk with the Liturgy Committee chairperson if this will not be possible for you.

B. Ongoing Eucharistic Minister Formation/Training has two components, a gathered element and an element of ongoing self-directed learning.

a. **Gathered** formation includes:

i. Attending the initial Ministry Matters presentation which will include intellectual, spiritual and practical elements;

ii. Attending any special training organized just for Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (Eucharistic Ministers); and,

iii. Attending any special formation for service during Advent, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, the Triduum, and Easter liturgies.

b. Ongoing self-directed learning activities include:

- i. Reading the articles, excerpts or reflections offered by the Pastor through the Liturgy Committee;
- ii. Using online resources like webinars, podcasts and online retreats for continued growth in mind and spirit; and,
- iii. Attending events hosted outside Saint Bridget that concern the liturgy or personal spirituality.

Assessment of the Liturgical Ministry of Lay Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

1. You will know that you are carrying out this ministry as we envision when:
 - a. You receive words of affirmation from the Pastor, the Pastoral Staff, the Liturgy Committee and, we hope, from the assembly.
 - b. You are asked to be part of the training team for new Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.
 - c. You receive written affirmation of your good work from the Pastor, Staff and/or Liturgy Committee.
2. You will know there is room for improvement in your ministry as a Lay Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion when:
 - a. After initial training, you are invited to re-train.
 - b. You have missed more than two scheduled liturgies and did not get a substitute or call/email the Eucharistic Minister Coordinator to assist you in getting a substitute.
 - c. A member of the Liturgy Committee cautions you that one or more behaviors are not aligned with the Pastor/Celebrant's expectations.
 - d. A member of the Liturgy Committee asks your permission to demonstrate something for you.
3. You will know that you will be asked to step aside from this ministry when:
 - a. You have failed to maintain the formation/training requirements for one full cycle.
 - b. You have failed to respond to telephone calls asking about your absence from scheduled ministry without a substitute.

c. Your physical ability to carry out the ministry has waned to the point that it calls more attention to itself than to the Real Presence of Christ you are trying to transmit (as determined by the Pastor in conjunction with the Liturgy Committee and in conversation with you.)

4. The process for asking you to step aside includes the following steps:

a. Observation of the actions that need correction by those charged with this assessment (Pastor, Priest-Celebrants, Staff and members of the Liturgy Committee) with a detailed account.

b. A personal conversation that offers an opportunity for discussion, demonstration and re-training.

c. Two more observations of the same or of a substantially similar action that gets in the way of transmitting Christ's Real Presence.

d. OR, a single repeat of failing to carry out your scheduled ministry and/or get a substitute after being alerted to the community's concern.

e. A second personal conversation in which you will be asked to step aside from this ministry and will be given some suggestions of other parish ministries where your time and talents match that ministry's needs.

f. An invitation to return to liturgical ministry in the next cycle with the required retraining.

Conclusion

Saint Bridget parish is grateful for your willingness to serve within the worship life of the parish. We are relying upon you to mediate Christ's Real Presence through this ministry and through your participation as a member of the assembly.

God of Glory, your beloved Son has shown us that true worship comes from humble and contrite hearts. Bless our brothers and sisters, who have responded to the needs of our parish and wish to commit themselves to your service. Grant that their ministry may be fruitful and our worship pleasing in your sight. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

With thanks to <http://www.thesacredheart.com/>

Appendix

To aid in your understanding of Lay Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion:

From “Introduction to the Order of Mass” from the USCCB:

20. Bishops, priests, and deacons are the ordinary ministers of Holy Communion. Instituted acolytes, when available, may assist as extraordinary ministers. Occasionally, however, this assistance will be given by other extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, either formally commissioned for a given period or, in case of necessity, deputed as needed by the priest celebrant.

21. These ministers serve Christ present in the gathered assembly by ministering his Body and Blood to their brothers and sisters. They also serve the unity of the worshipping community by taking Holy Communion to those members who are prevented by sickness, old age, or other cause from taking part in the congregation.