MINISTRY OF COMMUNION TO THE SICK

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

(John 6:51)

“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”

(1 Corinthians 12:12)

THE SICK BELONG IN THE PARISH COMMUNITY

“The faithful who are ill are deprived of their rightful and accustomed place in the eucharistic community. . . For the sick the reception of communion is not only a privilege but also a sign of support and concern shown by the Christian community for its members who are ill.”

(Pastoral Care of the Sick #73)

THE SICK WITNESS TO THE PARISH COMMUNITY

“By their witness the sick show that our mortal life must be redeemed through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.”

(Pastoral Care of the Sick #3)

SUNDAY MASS AND COMMUNION FOR THE SICK

The sick and the parish community both share in the one paschal mystery celebrated in the Sunday eucharist:

“Besides remembering the sick in the general intercessions at Mass, those present should be reminded occasionally of the significance of communion in the lives of those who are ill: union with Christ . . . and union with the community from which they are separated.

“The obligation to visit and comfort those who cannot take part in the eucharistic assembly may be clearly demonstrated by taking communion to them from the community’s eucharistic celebration. This symbol of unity between the community and its sick members has the deepest significance on the Lord’s Day, the special day of the eucharistic assembly.”

(Pastoral Care of the Sick #73)

MINISTERING TO THE SICK

Ministers of Communion for the sick, the infirm, the frail aged and the house-bound take their place with the many others who care for them: family members and friends, priests and deacons, parish pastoral workers, health professionals, and pastoral care staff. In a particular way they represent both Christ and the faith community:
In bringing communion to them the minister of communion represents Christ and manifests faith and charity on behalf of the whole community towards those who cannot be present at the eucharist.”

(Pastoral Care of the Sick #73)

THE MINISTERS AND THEIR ATTRIBUTES

Like all liturgical ministers, ministers of Communion to the sick are:

- baptised Catholics active in the life of the parish
- good-hearted men and women, forgiven sinners rather than saints
- motivated by a desire to serve
- willing to collaborate with the parish leadership and other ministers.

More particularly they are blessed with:

- compassion for the sick and infirm
- the ability to adapt to circumstance.

REALISING THE MINISTRY

PART ONE: BEGINNING WITH MASS

The ministry begins with full, conscious and active participation in the parish Sunday Mass, at which the whole community is fed from both from the table of God’s Word and from the table of eucharist. The more fully ministers participate in the parish Mass, the better equipped they will be to bear both foods – the gospel and the bread of life – to those who are isolated by illness, age or infirmity.

In preparation for their service ministers should:

- be fittingly attired
- have a pyx for the host(s) and a copy of the rite of Communion to the sick
- arrive in time to liaise with the presiding priest before Mass commences so that at Communion time he can place the appropriate number of hosts in the pyx and then commission them in the presence of the community to go forth on their ministry.

PART TWO: MINISTERING COMMUNION

Ministers need to be familiar with the structure and elements of the rite in order to:

- be faithful to the church’s mandate
- be capable of adapting to diverse and changing circumstances.

There are two forms of the rite, one for use at home, the other for use in institutional settings.

a) The rite at home

The rite for “Communion in Ordinary Circumstances” mirrors the Mass except for the Preparation of Gifts and Eucharistic Prayer:

INTRODUCTORY RITES

Greetings

(Sprinkling with Holy Water)
Penitential Rite

LITURGY OF THE WORD
Reading
Response
General Intercessions

LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION
The Lord’s Prayer
Communion
Silent Prayer
Prayer after Communion

CONCLUDING RITE
Blessing

Fruitful celebration of the rite depends on several factors:

- taking time to establish rapport with both the sick person and others who are present
- warm greetings and friendly conversation that not only pave the way for prayer but help inform ministers of what degree of adaptation may be called for
- the minister’s capacity to make a smooth transition from conversation to prayer and at the end from prayer back to parting conversation
- respect for the sick person’s rhythms of rest, meals and medication
- taking care to address the sick person directly to ensure that he or she is not an object of ministry but a co-participant with all who are present
- readiness to accept the fact that the sick person may be unwilling or too unwell to receive Communion on that occasion
- if necessary, assuring the sick person that there is no requirement to fast.

It is desirable that:

- a suitable place with a white cloth and candle be prepared for placing the sacrament
- the scripture reading be taken from the Mass of the day and usually be kept brief
- those present are invited to join in the intercessions
- there is a glass of water nearby in case the sick person needs to drink after receiving the host
- there be a period of silence after Communion
- a copy of the parish bulletin be left to connect the sick person with the community.

Ministers will be aware of the need to:

- maintain confidentiality and appropriate boundaries at all times
- ensure that proper infection control measures are taken as circumstances require.

b) The rite in a hospital, nursing home or other institution

This is a simplified and shortened version of the home rite:

INTRODUCTORY RITE
Antiphon
Liturgy of Holy Communion

Greeting
The Lord’s Prayer
Communion

Concluding Rite
Concluding Prayer

In ministering Communion to people in an institutional setting, the minister needs more than ever to be ready to adapt to circumstance. Particular considerations to be taken into account include:

• liaison with administrative and health care staff
• the degree of pain or discomfort the patient may be suffering
• any temporary embargoes on the patient’s oral intake
• possible shyness on the part of the patient in a public setting
• how to create a prayerful space, e.g. by drawing a curtain
• how to celebrate the rite reverently in a shared space.

A prayer

Holy God,
your Son Jesus bade us remember him
in the breaking of bread and the sharing of the cup.
We bless and praise you for these gifts
which bear for us the power of his death and resurrection.
May we who are called to minister
the Bread of Life to our sick brothers and sisters
bring them the compassion and love of Christ.
May they be blessed with healing of body, mind and spirit
and with the assurance of fellowship with the community of faith.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

For further reference


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