

Lay 'Eucharistic Ministers': Why Not?

"To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained" (Pope John Paul II, 1980 A.D.)

✦ **Introduction of So-Called 'Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist' → The Church Has Always Prohibited Lay Persons From Touching the Sacred Species ✦ Catholics Should Receive Communion Only From the Consecrated Hands of a Priest...**

Notice: Readers should note that the correct term for such lay 'ministers' is actually "Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion" and NOT "Eucharistic Ministers" or "Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist."

Introduction of So-Called 'Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist'

The use of so-called 'Extraordinary Ministers of the Eucharist' (also wrongly, but popularly, called 'Eucharistic Ministers') - lay persons (including women) distributing Holy Communion - began in the 20th century as a result of disobedience to the Pope. Their use, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, has contributed to irreverence, loss of faith, confusion of the priestly role, desecration, and sacrilege. Their use is an entire break with Catholic tradition, and it coincides with Protestant sensibilities. Many Catholics mistakenly believe this practice is the norm in the Church, however, the truth is that the use of these so-called "Extraordinary Ministers" was only to be tolerated under certain "extraordinary" conditions. And, even the limited, occasional toleration of them was extracted from the Holy See due to widespread disobedience on the part of certain persons (e.g. liberals/Modernists and feminists). In many cases they are not permitted, and the frequent use of them is recognized by the Church as an abuse. It should be noted that the Second Vatican Council never called for their use.

The Church Has Always Prohibited Lay Persons From Touching the Sacred Species

The administration of the Holy Eucharist to the faithful has always been reserved to the consecrated hands of priests (acting 'in Persona Christi', in the Person of Christ), whereas lay persons have always been forbidden to touch the Blessed Sacrament...

- "To safeguard in every possible way the dignity of so august a Sacrament, not only is the power of its administration entrusted exclusively to priests, but the Church has also prohibited by law any but consecrated persons, unless some case of great necessity intervene, to dare handle or touch the sacred vessels, the linen, or other instruments necessary to its completion. Priests themselves and the rest of the faithful may hence understand how great should be the piety and holiness of those who approach to consecrate, administer or receive the Eucharist." (Catechism of the Council of Trent)
- "To touch the sacred species and to distribute them with their own hands is a privilege of the ordained" (Pope John Paul II, 1980 A.D.)
- "For just as temple, altar, vessels, and vestments need to be consecrated, so do the ministers who are ordained for the Eucharist, and this consecration is the sacrament of Order." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")
- "There is nothing which belongs more to the Church and there is nothing Jesus Christ wanted more closely reserved for its shepherds than, the dispensation of the sacraments He instituted." (Pope Gregory XVI, "Commissum Divinitus", 1835 A.D.)
- "[L]aymen are officially incompetent to dispense any sacrament: and that they can baptize in cases of necessity, is due to the Divine dispensation, in order that no one may be deprived of spiritual regeneration". (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")

- "Can. 1306 § 1 Care should be taken lest a chalice, paten, or, before cleansing, purificators, palls, and corporals that were used in the sacrifice of the Mass, are touched by any other than by clerics or those who have custody of these things. § 2 Purificators, palls, and corporals used in the sacrifice of the Mass shall not be put into the hands of the laity, even religious, unless they have first been washed by a cleric constituted in major orders; and the water from this first washing shall be put into a sacarium or, in its absence, into a fire." (1917 Code of Canon Law)

- "The dispensing of Christ's body belongs to the priest for three reasons. First, because...he consecrates as in the person of Christ. But as Christ consecrated His body at the supper, so also He gave it to others to be partaken of by them. Accordingly, as the consecration of Christ's body belongs to the priest, so likewise does the dispensing belong to him. Secondly, because the priest is the appointed intermediary between God and the people; hence as it belongs to him to offer the people's gifts to God, so it belongs to him to deliver consecrated gifts to the people. Thirdly, because out of reverence towards this sacrament, nothing touches it, but what is consecrated; hence the corporal and the chalice are consecrated, and likewise the priest's hands, for touching this sacrament. Hence it is not lawful for anyone else to touch it except from necessity, for instance, if it were to fall upon the ground, or else in some other case of urgency." (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")
- "We must also visit churches frequently and venerate and show respect for the clergy, not so much for them personally if they are sinners, but by reason of their office and their administration of the most holy Body and Blood of Christ which they sacrifice upon the altar and receive and administer to others. And let all of us firmly realize that no one can be saved except without the holy words and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ which the clergy pronounce, proclaim and minister. And they alone must administer [them], and not others." (St. Francis of Assisi, emphasis added)

- "One must not forget the primary office of priests, who have been consecrated by their ordination to represent Christ the Priest: for this reason their hands, like their words and their will, have become the direct instruments of Christ. Through this fact, that is, as ministers of the Holy Eucharist, they have a primary responsibility for the sacred species, because it is a total responsibility." (Pope John Paul II, 1980 A.D.)

According to the Catechism of the Council of Trent, this practice is traced to Apostolic times...

"It must be taught, then, that to priests alone has been given power to consecrate and administer to the faithful, the Holy Eucharist. That this has been the unvarying practice of the Church, that the faithful should receive the Sacrament from the priests, and that the officiating priests should communicate themselves, has been explained by the Holy Council of Trent, which has also shown that this practice, as having proceeded from Apostolic tradition, is to be religiously retained, particularly as Christ the Lord has left us an illustrious example thereof, having consecrated His own most sacred body, and given it to the Apostles with His own hands." (Catechism of the Council of Trent)

The Use of Lay "Ministers of Holy Communion" Is Problematic

As indicated above, Modernists - "the worst enemies of the Church" (Bl. Pope Pius IX) and "the most pernicious of all the adversaries of the Church" (Pope St. Pius X) - in the wake of the Second Vatican Council have, by calculated disobedience to papal authority, sought to push these Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion upon the faithful. [Such persons may also wrongly attempt to usurp the priest's very title of "Eucharistic Minister," an abuse of the title which may only rightly be applied to priests.] The Second Vatican Council did NOT authorize the distribution of the Holy Eucharist by lay persons, nor was it ever the desire of the Pope. Rather, the practice was implemented in direct defiance of the Pope and became widespread. Unfortunately, the disobedience resulted in a partial 'surrender' by the Vatican (the practice may be reluctantly tolerated under certain conditions). As predicted, however, this practice has led to much sacrilege, loss of faith, and to the blurring of the priestly role. The practice of using lay "Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion" may be considered to be "fraught with danger". For example, consider that this practice:

- Leads to additional handling of the Holy Eucharist (two additional people may now touch it - the lay minister and the communicant) and therefore there is greater danger of spillage, profanation, and sacrilege
- Diminishes respect for the Holy Eucharist
- Diminishes respect for the priesthood by placing lay persons on the same level as priests
- Leads to loss of faith in the Real Presence
- Is a manifest rejection of tradition. Note that the practice of lay administered Communion during Mass has no historical precedent whatsoever (remember that even if the apostles self-communicated they were bishops - not lay persons).
- Is traced to acts of disobedience to the Pope
- Leads to 'self-communication' (the recipient may put the Holy Eucharist in his own mouth). Note: For more information on this topic, see *flier: "Communion in the Hand: Why Not?"*
- Reduces reverence and creates distractions
- Has been condemned by popes and saints
- Has been used as a tool by liberals and feminists who want to change the Church
- Is often used where it is prohibited - and becomes the de facto "norm" rather than an "extraordinary" occurrence
- Is especially scandalous given the poor behavior, immodest dress, and bad example of some extraordinary ministers
- Conforms to Protestant sensibilities - heretics who reject the Real Presence and the hierarchical priesthood
- Leads to the deplorable situation of Holy Viaticum being taken to the sick by lay persons - thereby depriving the sick of the presence of the priest & the other sacraments in their critical hour of need - possibly leading to the loss of eternal souls!

Note that (except in grave cases - e.g. danger of death without Viaticum) the Church has always reserved the handling of the Blessed Sacrament to the consecrated hands of priests. Unfortunately, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, the modernists promote the concept of lay persons (even women) administering Holy Communion in the Church. Besides the thorough inappropriateness of lay persons handling the Holy Eucharist, such practices contribute to abuse & profanation of the Sacrament, usurp the priestly role, and may even endanger the eternal salvation of the sick person. And, sadly, this practice occurs at a time when the sick person is most in need of (and possibly most receptive to) a priest. Not only does the sick person encounter a lay person (that they might not even know) daring to handle Holy Communion, but his (or her) presence there serves to deprive him of the comfort of the priest (if the priest sends a lay person, the sick person will probably not see a priest unless specifically requested - something which the sick may not have presence of mind to do or might be to embarrassed to ask) and may lead his mind to various negative thoughts (e.g. "I'm not important enough for the priest", "the priest doesn't have time for me", etc.). Also, if lay persons bring the Sacrament, how can anyone ever be certain it is actually a real Eucharist? Anyone - for whatever reason - could bring a wafer of bread and act as if it was the true Eucharist. Clearly, the priest alone is the most likely person to ensure the Sacrament is the true Eucharist. Further, the lay person's administration of Holy Communion may also make it difficult for the person to distinguish the Real Presence ("since it is given by a lay person, how can I be sure it is really the Blessed Sacrament?") - and thereby the sick person may make a sacrilegious Communion, leading to his damnation [For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying." (St. Paul, 1 Cor. 11:29-30)]. And, if that wasn't bad enough, it should be noted that the sick person who is "passed off to a lay person" may be deprived of the other sacraments (e.g. Anointing, Penance) - which may only be validly received from the hands of a priest - when they are most necessary to his salvation. Further, even if the lay person

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distributing Holy Communion is in a religious order, he or she (even brothers and nuns) may be improperly catechized with regard to the Holy Eucharist, leading to profanation and sacrilege [in one relatively recent case, a lay person gave Holy Communion to an atheist, even after being told that the person was a non-believer]. If one claims to love God and their brother, why participate in a practice fraught with danger to the Body and Blood of Christ and sincerely deadly to the soul of his brother? Rather, if lay persons sincerely desire to assist priests, they should find ways to assist which don't involve handling the Holy Eucharist. Rather, they can find areas to assist the priest which will free his time so that he may perform the duties which are proper to his office.

"Let the priest always have the Eucharist ready, so that, when anyone fall sick, he may take Communion to him at once, lest he die without it." (Pope St. Clement 1)

"Can. 911 §1 The duty and right to bring the blessed Eucharist to the sick as Viaticum belongs to the parish priest, to assistant priests, to chaplains and, in respect of all who are in the house, to the community Superior in clerical, religious, institutes or societies of apostolic life." (1983 Code of Canon Law)

"It is written (De Consecratione, distinction 12): 'It has come to our knowledge that some priests deliver the Lord's body to a layman or to a woman to carry it to the sick: The synod therefore forbids such presumption to continue; and let the priest himself communicate the sick.'" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church and "greatest theologian in the history of the Church")

Lay "Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion"

Although some (or even most) lay persons acting as lay "Extraordinary Ministers" may be well-intentioned, the actions of many may display a lack of humility and even thoughtlessness. Many who partake of such "offices" appear to be ignorant of Catholic truths or lack concern for God's will [One may be permitted to wonder whether they actually believe that God wants their hands touching Christ's body - even though the Church has always condemned this practice and even though their hands are not consecrated, and they are not celibate, and are possibly not living a life of holiness]. Some may simply be prideful (e.g. seeking status in the Church), while others appear to have assumed this role to pursue an agenda (e.g. those who want married priests or women priests). Also, unfortunately, experience shows that the role of "Extraordinary Minister" may be used as a "reward" for certain members of the "in group" in a parish, regardless of their apparent sanctity (or lack thereof), many of which may receive an "ego boost" (or feel they now have some special "status") rather than display the profound humility so praised in Scripture. Sadly, and despite the fact that those who administer Holy Communion unworthily merit "a great punishment", it is not uncommon for such lay persons even to display objectionable behavior (and dress) while administering the Sacred Species. This sets a bad example for the other parishioners and causes scandal.

Those lay persons who dare to participate in distributing Holy Communion should consider the following:

- When Uzzah touched something holy that he wasn't supposed to touch, he was struck dead (cf. 2 Sam. 6:6-7).
- David, and his men weren't allowed to take the holy bread unless they had absinated from women (see 1 Sam 21:5).
- "It should never be forgotten that the Sacraments, although they cannot lose the divine efficacy inherent in them; bring eternal death and perdition to him who dares administer them unworthily." (Catechism of the Council of Trent)
- "Listen, my brothers: If the blessed Virgin is so honored, as it is right, since she carried Him in [her] most holy womb; if the blessed Baptist trembled and did not dare to touch the holy head of God; if the tomb in which He lay for some time is so venerated, how holy, just, and worthy must be the person who touches [the Lord] with his hands, receives [Him] in his heart and mouth, and offers [Him] to others to be received" (St. Francis of Assisi)
- "[W]hoever handles and administers holy things, while blameworthy in his life, profanes them and is guilty of sacrilege." They who are not holy

ought not to handle holy things." (Pope Pius XI, "Ad Catholici Sacerdotii", 1935 A.D.)

Although those lay persons who distribute Holy Communion may feel they are living holy lives, they should consider that the practice of lay persons - even if they are celibate - by touching & distributing the Blessed Sacrament, usurp the priest's role, may contribute to a profanation / abuse of the Holy Eucharist, and may contribute to a loss of belief in the Real Presence among the faithful. They should carefully consider the words of St. Paul in Holy Scripture: "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are ill and infirm, and a considerable number are dying." (St. Paul, 1 Cor. 11:27-30)

Further, the practice of 'lay administered Communion' ["reluctantly tolerated (on a limited basis and under certain conditions) by the Vatican due to widespread and blatant disobedience"], when allowed, was only to be permitted in extraordinary situations. Instead - against the Pope's wishes and repeated lamentations regarding abuses - lay persons distributing Holy Communion is very often an 'every day' or 'every week' occurrence. In many cases, however, it is prohibited - and is therefore an abuse.

Women should especially consider that this is used as a tool to advance a feminist agenda, which is contrary to the will of God [Note: For more information on this topic, see filer: "Top Reasons Why Women Can't Be Priests"]. Note that the Church (in accordance with Scripture), has always rejected certain roles for women. For example, way back in the 4th century, the Council of Laodicea prohibited women from coming near the altar (see Canon 44). Recently, Pope John Paul II approved the document which states that "Women are not, however, permitted to act as altar servers" [Unfortunately, however, the calculated disobedience by certain persons resulted in the eventual, reluctant toleration of "female altar boys". Since this practice was always rejected by the Church and was only permitted as a result of disobedience, faithful & obedient Catholics continue to reject this practice which is so harmful to vocations and promotes a feminist agenda.]

Catholics Should Receive Communion Only From the Consecrated Hands of a Priest

Considering the above, faithful Catholics should reject the practice of 'lay administered Communion' and do all in their power to receive Holy Communion only from the consecrated hands of a priest. In some cases, this may require going out of one's way, dealing with disgruntled ushers who want you to go in a particular direction, annoyed parishioners who feel you are disrupting the flow of 'traffic', etc. Even so, one should keep in mind that the practice of 'lay administered' Communion has always been considered improper and is in use now only as a result of the disobedience of the faithful and the ignoring of the popes' wishes. It leads to abuse, sacrilege, lessening of respect for the priesthood, disbelief in the Real Presence, and otherwise causes great harm to the Church. In consideration of these realities, the minor inconveniences seem a small price to pay. One must remember that regardless of what others may be doing, we are responsible for our own behavior. Catholics have the right to receive Holy Communion in the traditional manner (from the priest, on the tongue) and must not feel compelled to take Communion from lay persons, even if they must act alone. We should keep in mind the many reasons why the use of lay "Extraordinary Ministers" is hurtful and should receive Holy Communion only in the traditional manner from priests, praying that others will soon follow (and educating them, if possible).

Clearly, one only has to look at the fruits of this practice to see that its introduction has caused great harm. As a direct result of this practice, great sacrilege has been committed, profanation has become frequent, belief in the Real Presence has plummeted, the priestly roles are confused, reverence and respect for the Holy Eucharist are down sharply, etc. When all is considered, the faithful should realize that this practice is also tied to the

disobedience regarding Communion under both species (laity are usually required specifically to handle Communion under the species of wine). Note: For more information on this topic, see filer: "Communion Under Both Species: Is it Required?"

For those that argue that Mass would be too long if there were no lay 'Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion', they may be asked how much time they spend each week watching television. One might also remind them that the additional time can be very profitably spent in thanksgiving for the great gift of the Holy Eucharist.

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Did You Know?

Abuses such as "Lay Ministers" are specific to the Novus Ordo (New Order) Mass - the Mass celebrated in most Catholic parishes since it was concocted by men after the Second Vatican Council in the 1960's. There are numerous and significant differences between the Traditional Latin Mass and the Novus Ordo Mass. The Traditional Latin Mass, has specific rubrics which prevent abuses and novelties, such as the use of "Lay Ministers". Communion in the hand, etc. Happily, you can still attend the Traditional Latin Mass - the highly reverent "Mass of the Saints" - the Mass in use for most of the life of the Church. This Traditional Latin (Tridentine) Mass is still validly said in Catholic parishes today. Contact your diocese for the nearest location of this incomparable Mass. If this Mass is not available in your parish, petition your pastor! Note: For more information on the Traditional Latin Mass, Try Visiting the Latin Mass / Catholic Tradition Section of MyCatholicSource.com

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