



**THE PURIFICATION OF
COMMUNION VESSELS BY
EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS
OF HOLY COMMUNION**
Diocese of Lansing
December 11, 2006

A Brief Background

A revised edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal, editio typica tertia* was released on March 20, 2000. Worldwide, all conferences of bishops were permitted to make limited adaptations suited to their member dioceses. The USCCB did so on November 14, 2001; these were confirmed by the Holy See on April 17, 2002.

While the 1973 and 1985 editions of the GIRM said nothing about extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the 2000 edition did. The bishops asked could an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion purify the vessels? While the United States bishops could have asked for a formal adaptation of the GIRM, they chose to seek an “indult,” that is, an exception to the law. In 2002, an indult was granted for a period of three years – with the permission of the local ordinary, extraordinary ministers could purify the vessels. Before the indult expired, the U.S. bishops petitioned for an extension.

Recent Communication from the USCCB President

On October 12, 2006, Bishop William Sklystad (President of the USCCB) received a letter from Francis Cardinal Arinze, Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments.

... Paragraph 279 of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal directs that the sacred vessels are to be purified by the priest, the deacon, or an instituted acolyte. The status of this text as legislation has recently been clarified by the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts. It does not seem feasible, therefore, for the Congregation to grant the indult from this directive in the general law of the Latin Church...

In turn, Bishop Sklystad sent the following letter to the U.S. bishops, dated October 23, 2006.

Your Eminence/Your Excellency:

I write to inform you of a letter received from Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, in regard to our recent request that extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion be permitted to assist in the purification of sacred vessels at Mass (Prot. no. 468/05/L).

As you will note, the Prefect reports that he brought the matter to the attention of our Holy Father on June 9th of this year and received a response in the negative.

As a result, it will be necessary to inform all pastors that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may no longer assist with the purification of sacred vessels at Mass...

Questions on the Purification of Communion Vessels in the Diocese of Lansing

Q. Does the bishop recommend the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds?

A. I endorse the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds, as I did in my “Particular Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion” (Diocese of Lansing, January 28, 2003).

I encourage pastors to instruct the faithful about the richness of this sacramental sign and about the proper methods for reverent distribution and reception (*Particular Norms...*, no. 13).

While there may be occasions when it would be pastorally problematic to distribute the Precious Blood to the faithful, such as Masses in prisons or stadiums, its regular distribution at parish Masses is encouraged.

...At celebrations where the number of the faithful are too great and the available ministers are too few, or at gatherings where the danger of spillage is present... it may be more prudent to offer Communion under the form of bread alone (*Ibid.*, no 12).

This reflects *Eucharisticum mysterium*:

“Holy Communion has a fuller form as a sign when it is distributed under both kinds. For in this form the sign of the Eucharistic banquet is more clearly evident and clear expression is given to the divine will by which the new and eternal covenant is ratified in the Blood of the Lord, as also the relationship of the Eucharistic banquet to the eschatological banquet in the Father’s kingdom.” ... Those who receive Holy Communion under the form of bread alone are not deprived of any of the grace that is necessary for salvation (GIRM 281-282 quoting *Eucharisticum mysterium*, May 1967; cf. *Norms...USA*, no. 20).

Q. When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, what happens to what remains of the Precious Blood?

A. When more of the Precious Blood remains than was necessary for Communion, and if not consumed by the bishop or priest celebrant, the deacon immediately and reverently consumes the Blood of Christ which remains. He may be assisted by other deacons and priests.

When extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are present, they, too, may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution.

Q. Who purifies the sacred vessels?

A. As ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the priest and the deacon are required to purify the sacred vessels. The instituted acolyte, by reason of his office, helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels (GIRM 279 and 284b). In the Dioceses of the United States of America, the ministry of instituted acolyte, is open only to men preparing to receive Holy Orders.

The vessels are purified on the altar or a side table following the Communion procession. They may also be purified in the sacristy immediately after Mass. The Precious Blood is never poured down a sacrarium.

Q. May an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion assist in the purification of sacred vessels?

In accord with the Holy Father's recent decision, as reported in Cardinal Arinze's letter of October 12, 2006 (Prot. no. 468/05/L), an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion may not assist in the purification of sacred vessels.

After the vessels have been purified, the extraordinary minister(s) of Holy Communion may cleanse and dry the vessels.

Q. When should these practices take effect?

Please catechize your extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion on these changes. Express my sincere appreciation for their faithful service to our assemblies and to the sick.

These directives take effect on Monday, January 8, The Baptism of the Lord.

Most Reverend Carl F. Mengeling
Bishop of Lansing

December 11, 2006