

The Training Of Lay Eucharistic Ministers

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1985 adopted a new canon which allows adult, confirmed communicants in good standing to be specifically licensed by the bishop to take the Holy Eucharist to hospitalized and shut-in parishioners of their parish. Until 1985 this ministry had been reserved to those in the ordained ministry, especially the diaconate.

Title III, Canon 3 (1985) specifies that “the function of the Lay Eucharistic Minister shall be limited to the following:

- a) Administering the Cup at any celebration of Holy Eucharist if there is an insufficient number of Priests or Deacons present;
- b) Directly following a Celebration of Holy Eucharist on Sunday or other Principal Celebration if so authorized by the Member of the Clergy in charge of the Congregation and especially licensed thereto by the Bishop, taking the Sacrament consecrated at the Celebration to those members of the Congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity were unable to be present at the Celebration.”

It is the second function that this tract addresses. This special license “shall be given only at the request, and upon the recommendation of, the Member of the Clergy in charge of the Congregation in which the Lay Eucharistic Minister will be serving.” (III,3.2) The new canon also states that the license “shall be issued for a period of time not to exceed three years and shall be revocable at any time by the Bishop, or by the member of the Clergy at whose request it was granted.” (*ibid*)

It is obvious from the wording of the canon that this is a very important and sacred ministry. It is not to be taken lightly or without great devotion. Nor does this new ministry replace the role of the clergy in visitation of the sick and shut-in, or of the Sacrament of Holy Unction. Instead, this “extraordinary minister” is to complement the ordained clergy in places where the clergy are unable to visit regularly due to such large numbers of sick or shut-in parishioners and shortage of ordained clergy.

In parishes where the number of shut-in parishioners is large, the practice generally seems to be to call monthly with the Reserve Sacrament. Lay Eucharistic Ministers allows the pastor to augment their reception of the Blessed Sacrament on a weekly basis. In small missions where the priest supports himself with a secular job, the Lay Eucharistic Minister can relieve the pressure on Sunday. But most importantly, this canon allows the laity to serve and care for their in a specific and pastoral way.

Lay Eucharistic Ministers should be chosen carefully. Firstly, they should believe they are called to this ministry. Secondly, they should

be faithful in their own *weekly* attendance on Sunday. Thirdly, they should be of mature character and Christ-like in their interpersonal relationships and lifestyle. And lastly, they must be willing to take the time to learn how to perform this ministry to the benefit of those they serve and be able to take direction from ecclesiastical superiors.

Suggested Training for Lay Eucharistic Ministers

THE REAL PRESENCE. By far the most important knowledge a Lay Eucharistic Minister (LEM) can possess is the Anglican Doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Once the significance of what the bread and wine have become in the Eucharist is understood, respect and proper devotion are sure to follow. This does not mean that the technical nuances of consubstantiation and transubstantiation must be comprehended, but belief in the Eucharistic Christ is absolutely essential.

THE PRAYER BOOK. The Rite for Reserve Sacrament Communions is found on page 396 of the *Book of Common Prayer* (1979). It would be to the benefit of both the LEM and the communicant if this rite were committed to memory or printed and laminated on card stock. Not only will the LEM need free hands in order to administer the Sacrament, but rarely in a hospital room is there space to spread out several books. If the opportunity for confession is given, the LEM should use the Declaration of Forgiveness found on page 452

(BCP’79) instead of substituting “us” for “you” as suggested in the rubrics for the deacon.

THE LECTONARY. If the congregation uses a printed service bulletin which includes the proper lessons for the day, it is recommended that the LEM take at least one copy for each communicant and one for him/herself. The collect of the day and the lections should be those from the Eucharist from which the Sacrament was consecrated. If, however, the parish does not use a leaflet, the LEM needs to know how to use the lectionary itself. The lessons can then be read either from a authorized translation of the Bible or from the *Lectionary Texts* published by the Church Hymnal Corporation.

ORIENTATION> When the LEM is not acquainted with community healthcare facilities, the hospital or nursing home can be a frightening place. Tubes, flashing lights, and cardiac monitors can unnerve even the most composed adult. To alleviate this anxiety the LEM should:

- A) accompany the priest or deacon on several calls;
- B) Tour local hospitals and nursing homes where parishioners live;
- C) Be introduced to the institutions chaplains by the priest or deacon and arrange a time to sit down and describe this ministry to them.

THE HARDWARE. If the Blessed Sacrament is to be carried in a small Mass Kit, it will be necessary for the LEM to know how to pour the Precious Blood into the tiny chalice without spilling, how to ablate the cruets, and how to use the spoon in ex

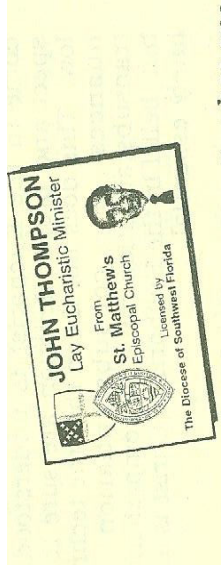
treme cases. If only the Host is carried, LEMs should be instructed on the proper wearing of the pyx. They should also be shown the appropriate container for returning soiled corporals and purificators.

PROPER ATTIRE. Since it has become the custom in many congregations to dress rather casually on Sunday morning, it might be necessary to instruct your LEMs to wear appropriate attire.

BESIDE MANNERS. Remember that the patient's room is their only remnant of privacy. Even if the door is wide open, the LEM should never enter a room without knocking. If the door is shut, the LEM should check at the nurse's station. Identifying him/herself as a Lay Eucharistic Minister from St. _____ Parish. The nurse can then advise the LEM as to whether or not the patient may be disturbed. Upon entering the room leave the door slightly ajar. Once in the room, the LEM should stand near the bedside (do *not* sit on the bed even when invited), and introduce him/herself to the patient and any family members present. The LEM should remain standing until after the Sacrament has been consumed. If the patient wishes to talk after Communion, the LEM should listen lovingly, but never make promises ("You'll be just fine") or lie about impending death ("Don't talk like that, your not going to die"). It is appropriate to ask the patient about their condition, but don't press for details if the patient doesn't want to talk about it. Do not do things for the patient without permission, such as raise/lower the bed or bring food. Watch the time—don't stay too long. Ten to twenty minutes is sufficient for the hospital patient. Remember, though, that shut-ins are

probably lonely and thirty to sixty minutes may, in fact, be welcomed.

IDENTIFICATION. Always provide your LEM with suitable identification. Your diocese or parish might want to issue an official identification card that the LEM could carry in their wallet or purse. In addition, a medal or specialized cross worn around the neck readily gives visual identification of the LEM to doctors, nurses, and security personnel. The St. Vincent medallion worn on a white ribbon would be especially appropriate if the LEM is a member of the Order. A Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament medal, if a CBS member, would also serve appropriately. So too, would a medal specially struck by the diocese. A hospital-issued name tag could also be used.



THE DEACON. If the congregation has one or more deacons, the LEM should be under their direct authority and supervision. The ministry of the diaconate (and thus the "sub-diaconate") should be fully explained to the LEM. It is vital that the LEM be instructed to report any needs of those they visit (such as counseling, Holy Unction, or private confession) to the deacon or priest in a timely manner so that appropriate follow-up by the ordained clergy can be made. If the communicant is in the ICU, the LEM should not attempt to see them, but should return to the parish and notify the deacon or priest.

Suggested Service addition for Commissioning Lay Eucharistic Ministers

Near the end of the Sunday Eucharist, after the Blessing, but prior to the Dismissal, the Lay Eucharistic Ministers, preferably in groups of two, are given the Blessed Sacrament in a Pyx or Mass Kit at the altar rail in the sight of the congregation. The Celebrant says the following, or some other appropriate prayer:

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we send forth these your servants with the blessed Body and Blood of your Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ: guard and protect them by the power of the Holy Spirit from impure thoughts and bodily harm, that they may nourish our absent *brothers and sisters* with your life-giving and healing Sacrament; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Go forth in peace.

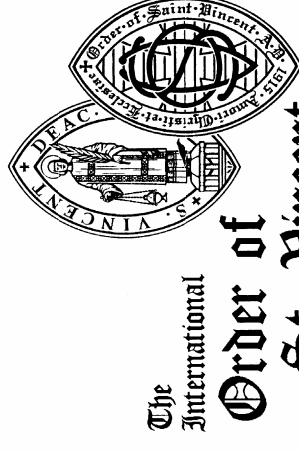
In the Name of Christ. Amen.

Upon Returning To the Church

After cleansing the Pyx or Mass Kit, the Eucharistic Minister goes into the nave and kneels at the altar rail, saying the following or other appropriate prayers:

Blessed are you, O Lord God, for you have fed us with the spiritual food of Jesus' Body and Blood; in your mercy comfort and heal N. And give him a happy issue out of his affliction; and grant that through my unworthy service you may be glorified; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

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