

Administering the Blessed Sacrament (Lay Eucharist Minister 1)

The 69th General Convention of the Episcopal Church authorized a form of lay ministry entitled Lay Eucharistic Minister. Title III, Canon 3 (1988) provided for the laity to: administer the Eucharistic Elements in “the absence of a sufficient number of Priests or Deacons assisting the Celebrant” [§5(a)(1)], and to take the Sacrament of the Celebration to those unable to be present [§5(a)(2)].

This tract is concerned with the first function of the Lay Eucharistic Minister, previously known as the “Chalice Bearer” or “Chalicer.” For information concerning the second function, refer to Tract #14, “Training Lay Eucharistic Ministers.”

For most of the Church's history the administration of the Blessed Sacrament was reserved to those in Holy Orders, but in the late 1960's, the Roman Church instituted the ministry of Lay Eucharistic Minister to relieve the pressure on the clergy at the Eucharist, due to the shortage of priests in that Communion. The Episcopal Church along with some other Provinces of the Anglican Communion authorized the use of lay persons to administer the chalice in the early 1970's in response to the shortage of deacons in parishes. Now that ministry has been expanded to resemble the Roman model.

For the Lay Eucharistic Minister at the rail (more commonly referred to as the Chalice Bearer or Chalice Administrator, and, now perhaps, also as a Paten Bearer or Paten Administrator) the two most important vessels of concern are the chalice (the cup used to hold the wine/Blood) and the paten (the plate used to hold the bread/Body).

The Chalice

The term "chalice" is an Anglicized form of the Latin word, “*calix*” which literally means “cup.” Throughout the ages this cup has taken many shapes. A typical cup in Jesus’ day would have had a short, coned shaped pedestal with a

two handled deep bowl atop. Chalice have subsequently been made of ceramic, wood, pewter, lead, glass, and even carved from a single, large jewel. But with the recognition of Christianity by the emperor Constantine in the late fourth century, ornate chalices of gold and silver, sometimes adorned with precious stones, became the norm. For “Folk Masses”, it’s not unusual to use an earthenware chalice and paten.

Bearing the Chalice

There are many ways to hold the chalice while communicating the faithful. Some holds help delivery, some hinder. Holding the chalice by the bowl and/or the bottom of the stem may seem like the most steady method, but in actuality it interferes with the communicants’ ability to guide the cup to their lips. “Fisting the knob,” otherwise described as grasping the chalice stem is another not-so-helpful way to bear the cup. This grip tends to be so tight that the communicant cannot easily tip the bowl, which makes sipping rather difficult. Fisting-the-knob is the most likely grasp you’ll notice when observing a communicant and chalice bearer struggling against each other. Probably the most efficient and easy-to-control method of bearing the chalice is the tried-and-true one. Although somewhat difficult to describe, and, perhaps, slightly awkward at first, this fulcrum method is the most secure while allowing the communicant to guide the cup as well.

To achieve the fulcrum hold on the chalice, use your dominant hand (either left or right) and firmly place the pad of the index finger against the pad of the thumb. The result is a finger configuration resembling the “OK” sign, or the letter “F” in American Sign Language. Pick up the chalice with the stem between the index finger and the middle finger, directly under the bowl. The bottom of the bowl should be resting against the side of the index finger and the knob resting on the inside of the middle finger. This grasp gives the Bearer firm control of the chalice, while still allowing flexibility for the communicant to tip the cup to their lips. Many priests will instruct their Chalice Bearers to hold their free hand in the fulcrum position also after assisting an intinction.

Your free hand holds the purificator, usually draped over the index finger. The purificator should be inverted so the embroidered cross is not visible and does not come in contact with lipstick that may me left on the chalice. The lipstick is very difficult to

remove from the linen. After each communicant has received the Sacred Blood, wipe the edge of the chalice and rotate the chalice slightly before administering to the next communicant.

Administering the chalice to the communicant is an art that takes practice to reverently, yet effectively deliver the precious Blood to their lips. The technique used will probably change depending upon whether the communicant is kneeling or standing. The most important aspect of a smooth delivery, however, is to allow the communicant to see the level of the precious Blood in the bowl, since he or she will want to be more careful with the movements of a full chalice than a nearly empty one. This way the communicant can gauge the angle needed to guide the chalice to their lips. Therefore, when communicating a kneeling person, the Chalice Bearer should deliver the Cup in an up-sweeping motion, like a “j”.

When communicants stand to receive this should pose no problem since the Chalice Bearer will most likely deliver the cup from below the communicant’s eye level making it easy for the one who is to receive to visually check.

The two most critical motions when administering the chalice are: A) delivering the cup to the lips without hitting the communicant's teeth, and B) tipping the cup sufficiently for the communicant to receive a sip without being drowned or spilling the Precious Blood.

Returning the Chalice to the Altar

When you have finished administering the chalice, return to the altar. If it is customary for a Chalice to assist the Celebrant in the consumption of the Sacred Blood, do so reverently and without ceremony. Leave at least two tablespoons of the Precious Species in the chalice for consumption by the celebrant or deacon. Place the chalice in the top-center folded square or the corporal Rotate the chalice so the cross at its base will face the celebrant. Cover the chalice with the purificator draped neatly over the edges of the bowl, then with the pall. Never leave the chalice uncovered.

The Paten

The root of the word “paten” isn’t as clear as for the word chalice. It could have derived from a Latin word, *patens*, meaning "to display." Or perhaps it

came from the French word *patene*, which means “small dish,” or the Latin, *patina*, “a pan.” Another possibility is the Greek word *patane*, which means “to spread out.”

According to tradition, the church of St. Lorenzo in Genoa Italy, possess the dish used by Jesus at the Last Supper for the consecrated Bread. It is a shallow glass bowl, hexagonal in form, with two small handles, deep green in color. It is quite possible, however, that our Lord used an Afikomen linen, used to wrap the unleavened bread at the Seder, instead of a dish.

In the early Church it was the common practice to use leavened bread rather than unleavened. Such leavened loaves were brought to the Eucharist by communicants. Consequently, early patens were more like the modern serving tray, being made of gold or silver and filigree in design; sometimes decorated with precious jewels. By the ninth century, unleavened wafer/bread had replaced home-baked bread and patens shrank drastically in size. Today, the paten is usually circular in form, and either nearly flat, plate shaped, or is "well" shaped, like a shallow bowl. Medieval patens were the first to fit atop the chalice bowl, probably giving rise to the ciborium in post-reformation England, by reversing the paten to fit as a "top" to the chalice. In the Eastern Church, the tray/paten never shrunk in size, but became a large circular dish standing on a raised foot. This "footed paten," still in use in the Orthodox Rite, is called a *tazza*, which means "tray."

Bearing the Paten

Since the communicant has no need to guide the paten as they do the chalice, holding the dish is not a problem for the Paten Bearer or Patener. The most convenient hold is with the non-dominant hand, so that the dominant hand can be used for conveying the Host from the paten to the hands or tongue of the communicant.

Traditionally, the Celebrant has used the fulcrum hold for distributing the Host also, out of respect for the Body of Christ which has been held between the thumb pad and index pad. The non-dominant hand may also be held in this fulcrum configuration and the paten is inserted between the index finger and the middle finger.

The necessity for holding the paten with this configuration, however, is not clear. Perhaps it is to create visual uniformity, so that all of the Administrators of the Sacrament would be holding their hands alike. However,

as with all aspects of serving, always follow the Celebrant's instructions.

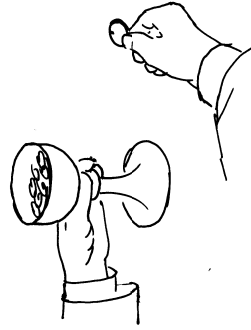


Holding the paten

When distributing the Host, there are two important aspects which require attention. The first is handling the precious Body Itself. The Paten Bearer should pick up a single Host by its edge, not in the middle of the Wafer. This enables the Bearer to place the Body either in the palm or on the tongue of the communicant. Wafers are very thin and they are easily broken by even a little too much pressure. By holding the edge, the Host is less likely to break as it is laid on the palm. Holding the edge also allows the Patener to place the Host upon the communicant's tongue without touching their tongue with the fingers. Even if it is not the custom to receive on the tongue in your parish or diocese, it is advisable to practice this technique so as not to be taken by surprise by a visitor or guest who prefers to receive in this manner. It is offensive to force a communicant to receive on the hands if they do not wish to handle our Lord's Body.

The second aspect is the use of the paten as a guard against dropping the Body of Christ on the floor. It takes virtually no effort to keep the paten directly beneath the Host as it is delivered into the hands or mouth, but some coordination is required, so practice before serving is prudent.

Use the ciborium in the same manner



Initiating the Host while holding a chalice, or distributing the Host from a ciborium

as the paten when administering from it. Hold it just as you would the chalice.

Pause briefly after saying the Words of Administration, allowing the communicant to respond with, "Amen."

Cleanliness

Prior to serving at the Altar, especially if you are to bear the chalice or paten, be sure to wash your hands thoroughly. Make sure that nails and fingers are spotless. Not only are dirty hands a sign of disrespect for the Blessed Sacrament, but are an affront to communicants as well.

Postures and Gestures

Unless you have something in your hands, keep the palms together or your hands clasped with fingers entwined at chest height. Do not simply dangle your arms at your side, join your hands behind your back or in the "fig leaf" position, or fold your arms. If you have something in one hand, place the palm of your empty hand on your chest.

When sitting, do not cross your legs or feet. Keep your feet flatly on the floor. Do not cross your arms. It is both irreverent and discourteous to browse the bulletin or flip through a prayer book during the sermon, readings of scripture, prayers, or announcements. It is, of course, proper to find your place and follow along with the liturgy, but this is quite different than becoming obviously detached and distracting.

Referencing

Chalice Bearers are generally senior in age to most acolytes. Therefore, they assume a responsibility to be examples and *de facto* mentors to those in the sanctuary who are less experienced. Members of the congregation will also look to and learn from your gestures and postures in the sanctuary.

There is no hard and fast rule issued by the Church on reverencing, and most parish practices vary from others to some degree. Your Rector will undoubtedly have specific preferences that should be followed, so it is best to ask. However, the following guidelines seem to be the most traditionally accepted:

When the Blessed Sacrament is reserved at or near the high altar:

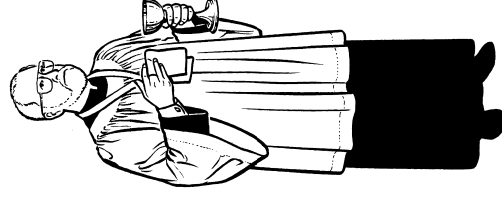
¹Genuflect when entering and leaving the sanctuary and whenever crossing the altar, ²except that you do not genuflect immediately after you have received Communion until just after the blessing. ³If the practice at your parish is for Chaliceists to approach the altar to receive Communion, you may be expected to genuflect in unison with the celebrant just before taking the Blessed Body. The reason for the exception after Communion is that ²once you have received, the Sacred Body dwells in you, and you needn't reverence to the Sacrament elsewhere or to any other object or person. This should also apply to the congregation, so it is not necessary to genuflect when returning to the pew after receiving Communion.

When the Blessed Sacrament is not reserved in the church or is reserved at a side altar or in an ambury at a considerable distance from the high altar:

¹Bow (moderate or solemn as preferred by your Rector) when entering and leaving the sanctuary and when crossing the altar, ²except that you should genuflect when crossing or approaching the altar (more technically, the Sacrament) from the time of the Consecration until immediately after you have received Communion).

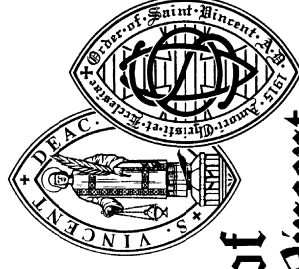
Regardless of parish customs, conduct your ministry with dignity, grace, and humility. Set aside your personality and your own preferences, and yield to the will of God and the desires of the Celebrant. Don't hesitate to share your knowledge and wisdom with those younger servants who look to you for guidance and inspiration.

For comprehensive instruction regarding postures, gestures, reverencing, and sanctuary manners, we strongly recommend your reading *Serving Basics*, published and distributed by the OSV.



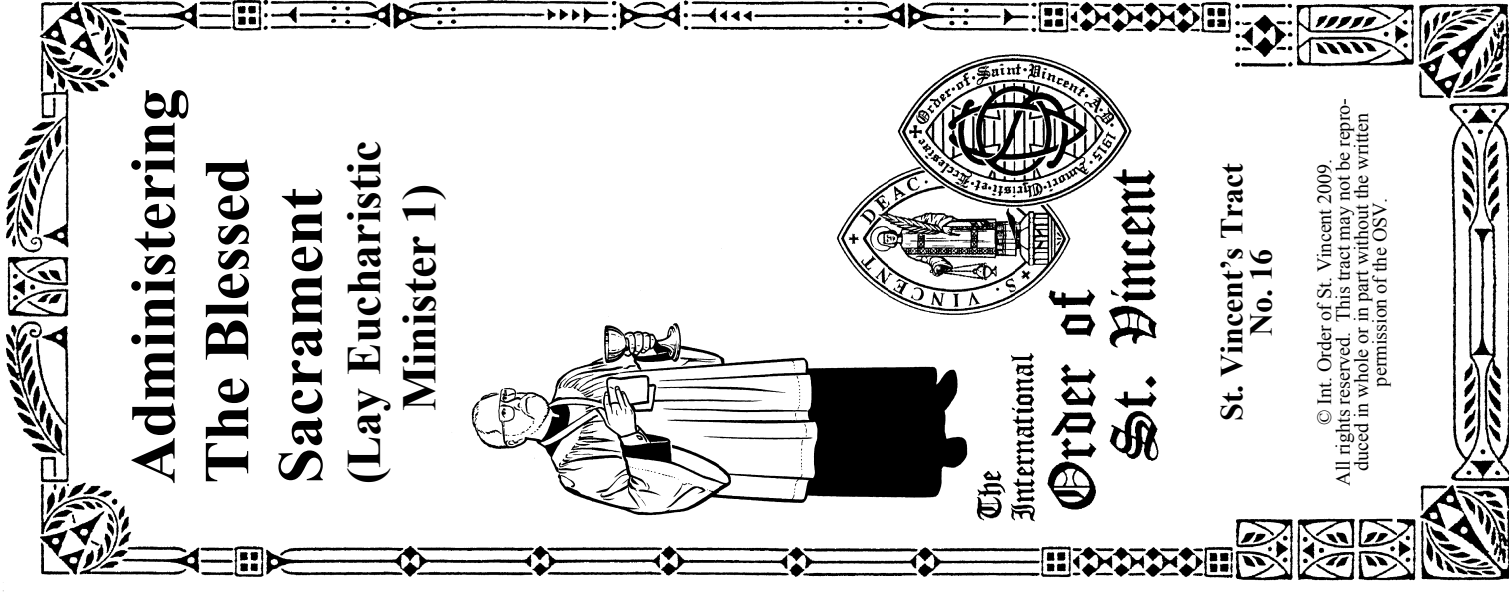
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