



PASTORAL GUIDANCE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
COMMUNION RITE AT MASS

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The Origin and Development

In February 2013, following the intervention of Bishop Bill concerning the Fraction Rite that takes place during the Communion Rite at the celebration of Mass, the Diocesan Liturgy Council (DLC) prepared a *Practice Note* offering advice and guidance on how that part of the Mass might be suitably celebrated.

In the intervening years, the Diocesan Liturgy Coordinator has fielded numerous questions from the parishes of the diocese that touch on the way in which the Communion Rite of Mass should be celebrated appropriately.

In reflecting on the nature of these questions and the way in which the celebration of the Communion Rite takes place, the DLC thought it appropriate to draft guidelines to assist the parishes, and the diocese, to celebrate the Communion Rite in a more fitting and appropriate way. In doing so, the DLC has returned to the source documents, particularly the 2002 edition of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), along with previous diocesan statements connected with parts of the Communion Rite to develop draft guidelines.

The draft guidelines were provided to Bishop Bill for his reflection and input and, in light of his feedback, were updated and finalised.

The Guidelines are available on the diocesan website, and is entitled: ***Pastoral Guidance for the Celebration of the Communion Rite at Mass***

Exhortation

The Communion Rite is a ritual unit within the Liturgy of the Eucharist that celebrates the final two parts of the four-part Eucharistic action – the breaking and the giving. Culminating in the reception of Communion, the Communion Rite contains the highpoint of the entire Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The parish celebration of Mass is infused with the faith of the parish community, and the celebration of the Communion Rite is the pivotal moment when the Body of Christ assembled receives the Body and Blood of Christ in order to become more fully who it is called to be.

I commend these Guidelines to you.

They are effective as of December 2, 2018 nothing the contrary withstanding, and abrogates all previous instructions.

Given at Hamilton, NSW, on the first day of November, 2018.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "A. Doohan".

Rev Andrew Doohan VG
Vicar General



Introduction

The celebration of Eucharist is referred to in the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* as the source and summit of the Christian life (a. 11). *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* says that we, the faithful, should not be there as strangers or silent spectators, but should take part fully conscious of what we are doing: being instructed by God's Word, nourished at the table of the Lord's Body, and offering Christ and ourselves with the priest (a. 48). Yes, we are offering ourselves with Christ! No wonder some writers say we should think twice before entering a church to celebrate Mass!

Our understanding of the Communion Rite is informed by this context. From its beginning with the Lord's Prayer, all the elements of the Communion Rite are preparing us for communion; for that procession when we, the Body of Christ gathered around the altar, come forward as sisters and brothers to receive the Body of Christ from the altar. As Augustine says, we receive what we already are, in order that we might become more truly who we are. It is in the action of holy communion that we become more truly a 'holy communion'.

If we are to take part in the Communion Rite 'conscious of what we are doing', presiders, liturgy teams and liturgical ministers must ensure the ritual action is shaped to reveal the truth of the mystery we celebrate. It is by doing the communion rite well, that we are prepared to proclaim our Amen truly.

The Body of Christ. AMEN!
The Blood of Christ. AMEN!

We hope the reflections and recommendations offered in the following pages address the questions some of you have posed in recent years.

*So now, if you want to understand the body of Christ,
listen to the Apostle Paul speaking to the faithful:
"You are the body of Christ, member for member." [1 Cor 12.27]
If you, therefore, are Christ's body and members,
it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord's table!
It is your own mystery that you are receiving!
You are saying "Amen" to what you are—
your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith.
When you hear "The body of Christ" —you reply "Amen."
Be a member of Christ's body, then,
so that your "Amen" may ring true!*

From 'Your Own Mystery', a Homily by St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (430 CE)

Best wishes



Louise Gannon rsj

Diocesan Co-Ordinator of Liturgy on Behalf of The Diocesan Liturgy Council.

October 2018





Pastoral Guidance for the Celebration of the Communion Rite at Mass

At the Last Supper Christ instituted the Paschal Sacrifice and banquet, by which the Sacrifice of the Cross is continuously made present in the Church whenever the Priest, representing Christ the Lord, carries out what the Lord himself did and handed over to his disciples to be done in his memory.

... For Christ took the bread and the chalice, gave thanks, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take, eat and drink: this is my Body; this is the chalice of my Blood. Do this in memory of me. Hence, the Church has arranged the entire celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist in parts corresponding to precisely these words and actions of Christ ...

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 72

The Communion Rite is a ritual unit within the Liturgy of the Eucharist that celebrates the final two parts of the four-part Eucharistic action – the breaking and the giving. It consists of the following individual ritual elements:

- ▶ The Lord's Prayer
- ▶ The Rite of Peace
- ▶ The Fraction of the Bread
- ▶ Communion
- ▶ The Prayer after Communion

In February 2013, the Diocesan Liturgy Council prepared a Practice Note about one part of the Communion Rite, namely the Fraction of the Bread. These present Guidelines replace and expand on that previous Practice Note.

In July 2018, the Australian Catholic Bishops' Commission for Liturgy (BCL) issued Guidelines on Reverent Reception of Holy Communion, which can be viewed at <https://www.catholic.org.au/commissions/bishops-commission-for-liturgy>

To assist parishes in their celebration of the Communion Rite, the Diocesan Liturgy Council offers the following guidance:

The Rite of Peace

Background

The Rite of Peace is an expression by all the members of the liturgical assembly of their ecclesial communion and mutual charity towards each other. In Australia, the usual expression of the sign of peace is the handshake, though other expressions particular to regions or customs are not excluded.

Guidelines

1. Members of the assembly should offer the sign of peace only to those who are nearest to themselves, and in a sober manner. It is not appropriate to walk around the church building.

The Presider offers the sign of peace to other ministers in the sanctuary. Ministers should not leave the sanctuary to offer the sign of peace to other members of the assembly, except for a valid pastoral reason, e.g. to the members of the immediate family during a celebration of a funeral Mass.

2. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be provided to members of the liturgical assembly as to the nature of the Rite of Peace and its appropriate practice so that the Rite of Peace does not unduly impact on the Fraction of the Bread.



The Fraction of the Bread (also known as 'The Fraction Rite')

Background

The Fraction of the Bread is, of its nature, a 'messy' point during the celebration of Mass, wherein the liturgical assembly transitions to an immediate preparation, and readiness, for the receiving of Communion. Additional vessels for the distribution of Communion may need to be placed on the altar; Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion will need to move from their seats into the sanctuary; although not the ideal, the Reserved Sacrament may, from time to time, need to be retrieved from the Tabernacle. It is quite understandable then how this moment in the celebration of the Mass can pass with minimal attention.

The practicalities associated with the Fraction Rite cannot be ignored. These physical actions need to take place for the natural flow of the liturgy not to be interrupted or delayed unnecessarily. They do, however, need to be seen in their proper context, and therefore take place in an appropriate way and at an appropriate point during the Fraction Rite.

The Fraction of the Bread is accompanied by the invocation *Agnus Dei*, either sung (preferable) or recited aloud. A reading of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal 2002* (no 83) makes it clear that the chant is an accompaniment to the action, and not vice versa (cf. *GIRM 1975*, 113). For the chanting, singing or reciting of the invocation to begin prior to the action of 'Breaking the Bread' would seem to be contrary to the intention of the *GIRM*. It is proper for the assembly to begin the invocation *Agnus Dei* when it is not sung; it should not be left to the presider to begin the invocation, nor should presiders habitually lead the assembly in the words of the invocation.

It should be observed that the 2002 *GIRM* notes that "The fraction or breaking of bread is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out **with proper reverence**, and should not be **unnecessarily prolonged** or **accorded exaggerated importance**" (*GIRM 2002*, 83, emphasis added). However, the 2002 *GIRM* omits



the sentence “This rite is not simply functional” that was found in the 1975 GIRM (no 56c). Clearly, this omission has some significance, and cannot be ignored, but neither can the new requirements of the *GIRM 2002* be allowed to be ignored. Good liturgical practice, then, would seem to lay somewhere in between these two extremes.

Guidelines

3. The Fraction Rite is a significant moment in the celebration of the Mass and should thus be given its proper influence. **It is recommended** that the Presider not begin the Fraction Rite until the Rite of Peace has been completed and a sufficient level of ‘stillness’ has returned to the liturgical assembly so that, in the prudent judgement of the Presider, it is appropriate to begin the Fraction Rite.
 4. The *Agnus Dei* invocation accompanies the Fraction Rite and not vice versa and should not begin until the Presider is ready to begin the Fraction Rite by the first ‘breaking of bread’. The invocation should continue until the ‘breaking of bread’ is completed and should not be unnecessarily truncated. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to musicians and members of the liturgical assembly so that they become aware the *Agnus Dei* invocation, whether sung or recited, starts with or soon after the first ‘breaking of bread’ and not immediately after the giving of the sign of peace.
- [Pastoral Note: Encouragement and catechesis should be given to the members of the liturgical assembly that beginning the invocation belongs to them and not the presider.]
5. Although some local consideration is required because of variety of church designs, **it is recommended** that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion move into the sanctuary of the church either during the Rite of Peace or after the Fraction Rite is concluded but not during the ‘breaking of bread’ itself (with all movement ceasing during that ritual action). **It is recommended** that Extraordinary Ministers be encouraged to sit closer to the sanctuary when they are rostered to fulfil that ministry to reduce the distance they need to walk.
 6. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are not required to wash their hands or use hand sanitiser when they move into the sanctuary of the church, and to do so can unnecessarily interrupt or delay the natural flow of the liturgy at this point. If a washing of hands is required in a specific case, this should take place in the sacristy, and well in advance of the time with the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion need to move into the sanctuary. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to all Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion about this matter.
 7. The placing or removing of items from the altar prior to the distribution of Communion is a necessary part of the preparations for that ritual act; these things need to take place, but should be carried out in such a way as to not detract from the Fraction Rite or unnecessarily delay the celebration of Mass. **It is recommended** that these actions take place either during the Rite of Peace or after the ‘breaking of bread’ is concluded but not during the ‘breaking of bread’ itself. Similarly, **it is recommended** that the Reserved Sacrament not be brought from the Tabernacle either before or during the ‘breaking of bread’ itself, but only after the ‘breaking of bread’ is concluded – and then only when absolutely necessary.



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The Rite of Peace is an expression by all the members of the liturgical assembly of their ecclesial communion and mutual charity towards each other.



Communion is something that is received, not taken.

Communion

Background

The reception of **Communion** itself is the culmination of the entire Liturgy of the Eucharist and should, therefore, not simply be a functional element of the celebration of Mass. The procession of the liturgical assembly, the Body of Christ assembled, to receive the Body (and Blood) of Christ and to become more fully who it is called to be, is a pivotal moment in the celebration of Mass.

The significance of everyone in the liturgical assembly receiving Communion from the elements consecrated during the actual celebration of the Mass – as opposed to receiving from the Reserved Sacrament – cannot be overstated. “...by means of the signs Communion may stand out more clearly as a participation in the sacrifice actually being celebrated” (*GIRM 2002*, 85). The habitual use of the Reserved Sacrament to enable the Communion of the liturgical assembly is something to be avoided.

The use of song during the Communion procession expresses “the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the ‘communitarian’ character of the procession to receive the Eucharist” (*GIRM 2002*, 86). The Communion procession is to be accompanied by song for as long as the procession continues. The Communion song(s) begins as soon as the Presider receives Communion and continues until all have received Communion; it is infinitely preferable, therefore, for musicians to minister to the needs of the liturgical assembly, and then receive Communion at the end of the Communion song(s).

The reception of Communion in Australia is governed by n. 160 of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002)* which states the following:

It is not permitted for the faithful to take the consecrated Bread or the sacred chalice by themselves and, still less, to hand them on from one to another among themselves. In the dioceses of Australia standing is the most common posture for receiving Holy Communion,

though individual members of the faithful may choose to receive Communion while kneeling. When approaching to receive Holy Communion, the faithful bow in reverence to the Sacrament that they are to receive.

Communion is something that is received, not taken. For this reason, the practice of 'self-intinction' is not permitted; Communion by intinction always involves the Priest intincting the host into the chalice and then placing the Sacrament in the mouth of the communicant. Care should be exercised by all ministers of Communion, ordinary and extraordinary, to ensure that requests for Communion by intinction are carried out correctly and in accord with the requirements of the *GIRM* a. 285, 287.

In the distribution of Communion, the Priest who presides may be assisted by other Priests who are present, by Deacons who are assisting at the Mass, and, if the number of faithful warrant it, by extraordinary ministers who have been legitimately deputed for this task. Priests and Deacons who are present and assisting at a Mass, who are ordinary ministers of Communion, should not be displaced by extraordinary ministers unless advanced age or illness prevent them from being able to assist in the distribution of Communion.

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may be appointed by the Parish Priest or equivalent for a specified term, not to exceed three years, which may be renewed by mutual discernment. Before appointment as extraordinary ministers, candidates should receive appropriate formation which is to be more than merely in their functional duties. A commitment to regular ongoing formation would normally be required for reappointment at the end of the specified term. (Please refer to the diocesan [Liturgy Formation Pathway](#).)

Extraordinary ministers are not to approach the altar until the Presider has received Communion. This does not mean, however, that they cannot move into the sanctuary of the church prior to

this time, as long as they are not moving during the Fraction of the Bread. Having moved into the sanctuary, extraordinary ministers should stand as far from the altar as physically possible and move closer only after the Presider has received Communion in order that they can receive Communion themselves before moving to their appointed place for the distribution of Communion.

It is an absolute requirement that those who are to assist in the distribution of Communion have first received Communion. **It is highly recommended** that those assisting with the distribution of Communion receive both the consecrated Bread and from the chalice, though this is at the discretion of individuals. All ministers of Communion – Priest, Deacon, or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion – should model appropriate behaviour in the manner in which they receive Communion.

Although it is difficult to give hard and fast guidance because of the wide variety of church layouts in the Diocese, as a general rule a ratio of two ministers of the chalice to each minister of the consecrated Bread greatly assists the flow of the Communion procession.

After the Communion procession, any remaining elements of the consecrated Bread are consumed by the Priest and Deacon or placed with the Reserved Sacrament in the Tabernacle. Afterwards, the purification of the sacred vessels takes place at the credence table, carried out by the Deacon or another suitable minister, including extraordinary ministers of holy communion (see *GIRM* 2002, 100, 107, 192). Within the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, this should be seen as an authentic interpretation by the Bishop of the liturgical norms.

Guidelines

8. **It is recommended** that all members of the liturgical assembly receive communion from the elements consecrated during the celebration of Mass. In addition, **it is recommended** that the Reserved

Sacrament not habitually be brought from the tabernacle to the altar before Communion and be retrieved only when needed (if at all).

9. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to musicians and members of the liturgical assembly to encourage the beginning of the communion song take place at the same time as the Presider receives communion, and its continuation until all members of the liturgical assembly have received communion. **It is recommended** that musicians be encouraged to receive communion towards the conclusion of the communion procession wherever this is physically possible.
10. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to the members of the liturgical assembly regarding the appropriate sign of reverence to be made before receiving communion, that this sign is the bow, and that the sign should take place in such a way as to be completed before standing before the minister of communion. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to the members of the liturgical assembly to discourage genuflection as a sign of reverence, particularly in the middle of the communion procession.
11. **It is recommended** that, where there are members of the liturgical assembly who habitually choose to kneel in order to receive communion, appropriate catechesis be given to ensure their actions do not impact on the safety and welfare of other members of the communion procession. Such catechesis might encourage those who wish to receive communion while kneeling to join the communion procession towards the end, or to take steps to ensure that those immediately behind them in the communion procession are not placed in an unsafe position.
12. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to members of the liturgical assembly and to Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion to ensure that the practice of 'self-intinction' does not take place during the reception of communion.
13. **It is recommended** that those members of the liturgical assembly who are discerned to be suitable as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should be properly formed according to the standards applicable in the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle and be commissioned for renewable periods of two years.
14. **It is recommended** that no special attention be given to the return of the Reserved Sacrament to the Tabernacle, since the focus during the celebration of Mass is to be the Altar; the Blessed Sacrament should be returned 'quietly', with only the minister directly involved genuflecting after returning the Reserved Sacrament to the Tabernacle. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to all members of the liturgical assembly and liturgical ministers on the contents of General Instruction of the Roman Missal, n. 274, concerning reverencing the Blessed Sacrament during the celebration of Mass.
15. Following the recommendations in no. 14 above, due care and reverence should be given the Blessed Sacrament in the manner it is handled prior to being returned to the Tabernacle. Poor attention to what is being held and handled can provide a poor visual catechesis as to the dignity due to the Blessed Sacrament.
16. At the conclusion of the distribution of Communion, "the Priest and faithful pray quietly for some time. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation" (*GIRM 2002*, 88). **It is recommended** that a variety of these options for the period after Communion be embraced by the liturgical assembly, and that silence not be excluded from this point of the liturgy completely.

The Prayer after Communion

Background

The Prayer after Communion brings the prayer of the People of God to completion and prays for the fruits of the mystery just celebrated to be made manifest. With the completion of the Prayer after Communion, the Communion Rite is drawn to a close.

Like all prayers of the Proper of a Mass (the Collect, the Prayer over the Offerings, and the Prayer after Communion), the Prayer after Communion is to be prayed with the entire liturgical assembly standing (see *GIRM 2002*, 43). Standing is, and should be seen as, the proper posture for these prayers.

The liturgical assembly should stand for the Prayer after Communion even if something is to occur after the Prayer is completed for which they will sit.

Guidelines

17. **It is recommended** that any practice where the Prayer after Communion is prayed with the Priest and liturgical assembly seated be discontinued immediately. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to the members of the liturgical assembly as to the proper posture for praying the prayers of the Proper of the Mass, including the Prayer after Communion.



Other Related Issues

Blessings for Children and Non-Communicants

The common practice of encouraging people, especially children, to come forward in the Communion Procession for a blessing when they are not able to receive Communion is a problematic one. At the heart of the practice is an attempt to see no presence of difference within the liturgical assembly, even when that difference is clearly present. The Church, as the Body of Christ, is made of many and different parts, and difference is not something to be avoided. True catholicity is found when differences are identified and celebrated.

The sharing in the Body of Christ in the reception of Communion is a significant part of the entire celebration of Eucharist. That sharing marks us out as different and that difference is not to be diminished. The possibility of entering into the fullness of the Body of Christ by participating in the Communion Procession and receiving Communion should not be diminished by an attempt to either eliminate difference or encourage similarity.

Just as no person can be compelled to receive Communion during Mass, since that is always a choice each person makes on each such occasion, it is never appropriate to insist that a non-Catholic or non-communicant join the Communion Process to receive a blessing. Everyone who is in attendance at any liturgy will be blessed at the end of the liturgy; participation in the Communion Procession is for the purpose of receiving Communion not for pre-empting the blessing that will shortly follow.

When small children join the Communion Procession with their parents they do so largely because they are small children and will naturally follow or be carried by their parents. In these circumstances, it would be entirely appropriate to bless the small child who is walking with or being carried by their parent. The manner in which this is



undertaken is dependent upon who the Minister of Communion is.

Of course, if an individual is moved on a particular occasion to come forward as part of the Communion Procession for a blessing rather than to receive Communion, they are not to be denied. Neither, however, should they be encouraged, and under no circumstances is it to be demanded of them.

Guidelines

18. **It is strongly recommended** that the practice of encouraging or insisting non-communicants to process forward as part of the Communion Procession to receive a blessing be discontinued.

19. When a person presents for a blessing in the Communion Procession – child or adult – **it is recommended** that:

19.1. An ordinary Minister of Communion (i.e. a member of the clergy) **either** makes the sign of the cross over the person

or traces the Sign of the Cross on the person's forehead, with both actions accompanied by suitable words.

19.2. An Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion **either** traces the Sign of the Cross on the person's forehead **or** place their hand on the person's head, with both actions accompanied by suitable words.

The Timing of Collections

The timing of the two collections that are customary in most parts of Australia can be problematic from a very practical perspective.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (n. 73) makes the point that "Even money or other gifts for the poor or for the Church, brought by the faithful or collected in the church, are acceptable; given their purpose they are to be in a suitable place away from the Eucharistic table." This is the only place in the General Instruction where the collection of money is mentioned. Accordingly, the logical

conclusion would be that this is the only point where a collection or collections should take place.

The *General Instruction* also mentions “When the distribution of Communion is over, if appropriate, the Priest and faithful pray quietly for some time. If desired, a Psalm or other canticle of praise or a hymn may also be sung by the whole congregation” (n. 88). The purpose of the period after Communion, therefore, is given over to personal prayer or corporate praise; the inclusion of a collection at this point would appear to not be in keeping with the intention of the *General Instruction*.

While it is difficult to be prescriptive about the proper placement of the two customary collections, it would appear from the *General Instruction* that the most suitable time for the taking up of the two collections would be prior to the presentation of the gifts. In this scenario, both collections would be taken up either immediately after each other or through the use of different ‘baskets’ to distinguish the two collections. The collected offerings would then be brought forward together with the bread and wine while the entire assembly sings a suitable hymn or other piece of music.

It is recognised that this scenario might not be possible or practicable in some settings. In such circumstances, **it is recommended** that the two customary collections take place in such a way as to honour the inherent nature of the respective parts of the liturgy as indicated above.

Guidelines

20. **It is strongly suggested** that wherever possible the two customary collections be taken up prior to the presentation of the bread and wine. **It is recommended** that appropriate catechesis be given to the members of the liturgical assembly, and to those responsible for taking up the collections, as to the proper place of the collections in the liturgy.
21. **It is strongly recommended** that where the scenario outlined in n. 20 above is not considered possible or practicable, suitable consideration be given by local liturgical assemblies as to how the collections can be structured in keeping with the intent of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*.



Christ Has No Body

Christ has no body but yours,

No hands, no feet on
earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with
which he looks

Compassion on this world,

Yours are the feet with which
he walks to do good,

Yours are the hands,
with which he blesses
all the world.

Yours are the hands,
yours are the feet,

Yours are the eyes,
you are his body.

Christ has no body
now but yours,

No hands, no feet
on earth but yours,

Yours are the eyes with
which he looks

Compassion on this world.

Christ has no body now on
earth but yours.



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