



Eucharistic Visitor Guidelines

In The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania





The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

240 South Fourth Street

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106-3722

Revised March 2005

Eucharistic Visitor Guidelines

Introduction

Imagine yourself looking forward to a big party — maybe a family reunion. You’ve been going to this annual celebration for years, and wouldn’t miss it for anything: There are lots of people you only see at this gathering, and you’re eager to hear their news and to share in the celebration of what it means to be a member of your special family.

One of the members you’re looking forward to seeing is your Aunt Betty, an integral part of these parties since before you were born. But three days before the big event, Betty falls and breaks her hip. No amount of pleading, bribery or threats can change the fact that she will not be able to be present at this wonderful celebratory meal.

As soon as you hear of Betty’s mishap, you call to tell her that you and the other family members are very upset that she won’t be able to be with you; you will, at least, you say, stop by on your way home from the party to bring her some of the wonderful food, and all the news and table discussion.

At the party, you and the others are aware of Betty’s absence — you all miss her, and you in particular are thinking of her and making a point of remembering what goes on so you can share it all with your absent aunt.

You collect a plate of food for her; and in fact you are so eager to have her be part of the celebration that you

don't even stay for the last farewells, but leave as soon as the meal is finished, calling out your good-byes and bringing with you the family's love and their best wishes for Betty's speedy recovery.

When you arrive at Betty's, you ask how she's feeling and talk about her situation. Then, still full of the party you have just left, you tell her all the news; you report the discussion at the table, and serve Betty the delicious food you have brought. Of course, it is not the same as her actually being there; but, still, she can share in the family celebration and feel a part of the day's festivities.

You have done for your aunt in a secular celebration what Eucharistic Visitors do for our Eucharistic celebrations: Bring the news and the meal to those who cannot be with the rest of the family to share in the communion.

Of course, our Eucharist is centered on Jesus the Christ, present not just in the family of believers, but also in the meal itself: The Eucharistic Visitor brings to the absent member God mystically present in the sacrament when he or she brings the Gospel news of the day, the news of the Christian parish family, and the bread and wine of our communion meal.

But just as we celebrate the Eucharist in our faith community, so does the Eucharistic Visitor, by coming straight from the Eucharistic table to the ill or immobile, try to bring the whole family to them as much as possible and to include them in the celebration. The table the Eucharistic Visitor sets in the hospital or home is an extension of the altar table at which their brothers and sisters in Christ just ate their communion meal.

A Brief History of Eucharistic Visitor Ministry

In 1985, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church passed a canon allowing lay people to take the Eucharist immediately after the Sunday service to ill and infirm members of their congregation. (In fact, the licensing of laity to distribute Holy Communion began in 1967, when Licensed Lay readers were permitted, by special Episcopal permission, to serve as chalice bearers.) The 1988 edition of the Canons sought to clarify the functions of Chalice Bearers (one type of Eucharistic minister) and what are generally now referred to as Eucharistic Visitors, making it clear that separate licenses were required:

"The Lay Eucharistic Minister shall have one or both of the following functions, as specified in the license:

- "1. Administering the elements at any Celebration of Holy Eucharist in the absence of a sufficient number of Priests or Deacons assisting the celebrant;*
- "2. Directly following a Celebration of the Holy Eucharist on Sunday or other Principle Celebrations, taking the Sacrament consecrated at the Celebration to members of the Congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity, were unable to be present at the Celebration."*

— Canon (1988) III.3.5(a)

"A Eucharistic Visitor is a lay person authorized to take the Consecrated Elements in a timely manner following a Celebration of Holy Eucharist to members of the congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity, were unable to be present at the Celebration. A Eucharistic Visitor should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, or otherwise; the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith."

— Canon (2003) III.4.7

In 1986, the Standing Liturgical Commission of the Episcopal Church developed a rite for such "Distribution of Holy Communion by Lay Eucharistic Ministers to Persons who are Ill or Infirm"; and they developed a list of "Suggested Guidelines" for this ministry. The next section reproduces the current guidelines from the 2003 edition of *The Book of Occasional Services*, pages 325 and 326.

In 2003, General Convention recognized the separate functions of ministry and visitation and gave different names to those serving in each of those licensed ministries: Eucharistic Minister and Eucharistic Visitor. See Canons (2003) III.4.6-7.

Although the following two sections from *The Book of Occasional Services 2003* accurately describe the function of a Eucharistic Visitor, the terminology is the previously accepted "Lay Eucharistic Minister". Therefore, from this point on, wherever you see "Lay Eucharistic Minister" read "Eucharistic Visitor". Changes take time.

Lay Eucharistic Ministers specially licensed to take the Sacrament to those who are ill or infirm.

Suggested Guidelines

1. Lay Eucharistic Ministers must be adult confirmed communicants in good standing, be carefully chosen and trained, and be specially licensed. A candidate is to be recommended to be licensed by the cleric in charge of the congregation to the Bishop of the diocese to be licensed. “Such 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. 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.” (Title III, Canon 3, Sec. 2) [sic]
2. Where a Deacon serves in a congregation, that minister should supervise the work of the Lay Eucharistic Ministers.
3. It is recommended that the person to be ministered to be prayed for specifically in the Prayers of the People by the congregation on that day.
4. The administration of the Sacrament to the

persons visited should take place immediately after the service in the church. Following the communion of the people, the Lay Eucharistic Ministers come forward and are commended for this ministry with the following or similar words:

In the name of this congregation, I send you forth bearing these holy gifts, that those to whom you go may share with us the communion of Christ's body and blood. We who are many are one body, because we all share one bread, one cup.

5. A suitable container in which to carry the two vessels for the bread and wine, corporals, and purificators is to be supplied. The container is to be returned immediately to the parish along with any unconsumed elements.
6. The people to whom Holy Communion is to be administered are to be notified in advance and the time of the appointment clearly set.
7. Only the order of the rite entitled "*Distribution of Holy Communion by Lay Eucharistic Ministers*" is to be used.

— The Book of Occasional Services 2003, Church Publishing, New York, 2004

Distribution of Holy Communion

*by Lay Eucharistic Ministers
to persons who are ill or infirm*

This form is to be used only immediately after the principal Eucharist on Sunday or other Principal Celebrations.

The Lay Eucharistic Minister should be accompanied by other persons from the congregation.

The Lay Eucharistic Minister greets the people

The Peace of the Lord be always with you.

Response And also with you.

Collect of the Day

Gospel of the Day, or some other passage of Scripture appropriate to the occasion.

Comments may be made about the sermon of that day.

Suitable prayers may be offered.

A Confession of Sin may be said

Most merciful God,
we confess that we have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what we have done,
and by what we have left undone.
We have not loved you with our whole heart;
we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,
have mercy on us and forgive us;
that we may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name. *Amen.*

Minister May Almighty God in mercy receive our
confession of sorrow and of faith,
strengthen us in all goodness,
and by the power of the Holy Spirit
keep us in eternal life. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

Administration of the Holy Communion

(using one of the authorized words of administration)

Closing Prayer

O gracious God, whose Christ stretched out arms of love upon the hard wood of the cross to embrace all the peoples of the earth: We give you thanks for feeding *N.* our *sister* with the Sacrament of that precious Body and Blood, which is the sign and instrument of our common life, and also for enriching our parish family by *her* sharing with us the food of our pilgrimage, the foretaste of that heavenly banquet of which we shall partake with all your saints; through Jesus Christ, our Savior. *Amen.*

Minister Let us bless the Lord.

Response Thanks be to God.

— The Book of Occasional Services 2003, Church Publishing, New York, 2004

Policies of The Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania

1. Each parish may have one, two, or three licensed Eucharistic Visitors. They are to be recommended not only by the cleric in charge but by the vestry of the parish, as well. If there is an extraordinary situation in which more than three Eucharistic Visitors are needed, petition may be made to the Bishop for additional Eucharistic Visitors.
2. Training of all Eucharistic Visitors in the diocese is to be supplied by a deacon appointed by the Bishop. Training sessions will be held twice a year and publicized in the monthly diocesan newsletter and the Leadership Institute catalog. The training deacon will notify the Bishop after each session, including the names and parishes of those trained. The cleric in charge of the trainee's parish will also be notified that the training has been completed; the cleric in charge will then need to request, in writing, that the bishop license the person(s) as Eucharistic Visitor(s). Licenses may be renewed by the bishop for additional three-year periods, at the request of the clergy in charge of the congregation.
3. Eucharistic Visitors may take Holy Communion to the ill or infirm following a Eucharistic service which contains the Service of the Word, with a preached sermon, on the following days: Any Sunday Eucharist, or a Eucharist on Ascension Day, All Saints' Day, Christmas Day or the Epiphany; or any regularly scheduled weekday Eucharist.

Comments and Suggestions

The use of Eucharistic Visitors is a recognition of the centrality of the laity in the ministry of and to God's people. It is not designed to take the place of regular visitation by the clergy. It is designed as a way of bringing the Eucharistic celebration to as many members of the congregation as possible, and to do so through the presence of members of that same congregation.

*Note that the rite in The Book of Common Prayer, "Communion under Special Circumstances", is **not** the appropriate rite for Eucharistic Visitors; only the Distribution of Holy Communion rite (found on page 9 of this booklet) is to be used.*

Many people who are Eucharistic Visitors are also licensed Eucharistic Ministers (formerly called Chalice Bearers). Since the Eucharistic Visitor will be leaving the service immediately after receiving communion (before the post-communion prayer) it would be awkward for the same person to function in both roles on the same day. It is preferable not to serve in both capacities at the same service also because, the Eucharistic Visitor represents the whole of the congregation, rather than the chancel party. The unvested presence of the Eucharistic Visitor serves as a reminder of the representative role.

It is particularly joyful to be accompanied to the ill person by other members of the congregation: It is an even more visible statement of the bringing of the party to the absent member.

At the same time, it is meant for absent members of the congregation, and is not an evangelical tool: Other nursing home residents, for example, are not to be

rounded up to take part. (While a larger nursing home worship service might well be a good idea, this is an entirely separate form of ministry and should not be confused with this very specific Eucharistic Visitor ministry.) The analogy of the family party may help here in clarifying the situation: You are bringing, in spirit, the family to its absent member, sharing the news and the celebration of a community of faith.

People often ask whether or not a Eucharistic Visitor may take reserved sacrament from the aumbry to an ill parishioner at a more convenient time during the week. Again, the metaphor of the party may help. Going to visit Aunt Betty on Wednesday after the party, and making up a nice lunch for her may be a wonderfully loving thing to do; but it is not the same as bringing the party to her.

There are other opportunities for the sick to receive communion: The clergy undertake this ministry. There are also many opportunities for pastoral visitation, by both clergy and laity. The ministry of the Eucharistic Visitor is a very specific gift, clearly spelled out in the canons and the service rite. It is not designed as a way to ease the pastoral burden of the clergy, but as a unique ministry of the laity which offers spiritual nurture to the shut-in, underscores the unity of the Body of Christ and fosters an appreciation of the faith community and the mutual ministry in which we are engaged.

Suggested Routine

1. Your rector or deacon calls you at the beginning of the week to ask if you could take communion to so-and-so on Sunday. You agree.
2. You call so-and-so and make arrangements to bring him or her communion Sunday at a specific time. If he or she is in the hospital, or in a nursing home, it is advisable to check with the nurses' station to make sure that the time you have chosen is an appropriate one. While you want to go immediately after the service, it may be necessary to delay for an hour or so until the person is finished with lunch or other institutional activities. You ascertain whether or not it would be appropriate to include other parishioners or family members. If so, you make arrangements with them to accompany you.
3. You inform the person in charge of the prayers of the People that you will be taking communion to so-and-so. During the week, you will want to keep the person(s) you will be taking communion to in your prayers. You will want to keep in mind — and lift to God — their state of health, their family, friends, and caregivers, and to ask for God's healing grace in their lives. You will also want to pray for yourself, that you may be an effective instrument of God's grace.
4. On Sunday, you attend the celebration of Holy Eucharist. The person you are taking communion to is prayed for: e.g., "...and we pray for so-and-so, to whom the sacrament is being taken this day".

5. After the congregation have all received communion, the priest or deacon gives you bread and wine which have been consecrated at the service.

Deacon or Priest

In the name of this congregation, I send you forth bearing these holy gifts, that those to whom you go may share with us in the communion of Christ's body and blood. We who are many are one body, because we all share one bread, one cup.

Or another form of sending you forth may be used. It is particularly appropriate to involve the congregation in this sending forth, as they do in the Diocese of Colorado, where they use this form:

Deacon or Priest

[Name of Eucharistic Visitor], we send you out to share Communion today with [Name] and [Name].

People

May you carry the prayers of all of us as you take this sacrament of Christ's presence.

Deacon or Priest

May those who receive it from you be strengthened and encouraged in that community we have together in our Lord Jesus Christ.

All

Amen.

Other dioceses, including the Diocese of Washington and Los Angeles, use this form, which also includes the congregation:

Deacon or Priest

In the name of this parish family, I send you forth bearing these Holy gifts, that those to whom you go may share with us in the Communion of Christ's Body and Blood.

People

We who are many are one body because we all share one bread, one cup.

6. You go to so-and-so to make a visit which is both pastoral and sacramental. You will of course be concerned about the person's health and state of mind. You may be one of few people to visit him or her, and it is crucial that you bring not only consecrated elements and the greetings of fellow parishioners, but also the love of Christ in your attentive, interested presence. In this ministry, you are often the bearer of hope and healing. How long the visit is, and how much of the visit is devoted to pastoral concerns and how much is spent on the communion service — all of these will depend on the person's needs and desire. You will want to take with you
 - the consecrated elements in appropriate containers;
 - the service booklet and lectionary leaflet (or *The Book of Common Prayer* and Bible);

and possibly

- a page or two of appropriate prayers which you have collected for this purpose;
- a copy of the sermon if available and desired;
- a list of parish activities (possibly contained in the service booklet);
- two (or more) copies of the rite you will be administering; and
- any other offering (a card or note from the Lay Pastoral Care Committee, for example) that is appropriate.

The service will be discussed elsewhere, but note that after the reading of the Gospel lesson, it is desirable to make comments about the sermon that was preached; and to invite the person to comment on the day's Scripture and to offer his or her own prayers when appropriate in the service.

Depending on the health of the person, it may be appropriate for you to mention those other parishioners for whom the congregation has prayed. When one is very ill, it may be unreasonable to think that he or she would have the energy necessary to pray for others; but if the person you are visiting is "on the mend" or sufficiently healthy to be concerned about others who may be in need or trouble, he or she may welcome the opportunity to minister to others through prayer.

The administration of the elements can be complicated by ill health. Remember that Christ is fully present in both the bread and the wine, so that it is not necessary for a communicant to receive both. It is often helpful to bring a small spoon for the administration of wine to a bedridden person; or the bread may be intincted in the wine and then given to the person. Some parishes have the custom of preintincting the wafers and taking only a pyx to the person. In such a case, the words of administration would be joint: "...the body and blood...." With anyone who may have difficulty swallowing, because of their position (lying down) or infirmity, it is wise to arrange before hand to have some water ready.

All of the elements you have with you are consecrated. They will need to be fully consumed or appropriately disposed of. Do not pour more wine into your chalice than you and those to be communicated can consume; otherwise, you are left with the difficulty of disposing of the wine in, e.g., a hospital room, or pouring it back into a bottle to be disposed of elsewhere. Any unconsumed wafers, crumbs, other bread, and wine should be enclosed in appropriate containers after the service.

7. After you have left the person, take a few quiet minutes to pray in thanksgiving for the ministry you have been part of, and to pray for the person you visited and for yourself.
8. The unconsumed elements need to be reverently consumed, poured in a piscine which drains into the ground (not a regular sink), or buried in or

poured on the earth. The containers, including the chalice and paten should be rinsed once and the rinsing water disposed of similarly. After that rinsing, the containers, chalice and paten may be washed and dried normally and returned to the parish. You will need to discuss with your deacon or priest the appropriate way to return the communion set and linens you have used.

9. When you return the communion set, or at another time soon after your service, enter the communion in the parish register. Your deacon or priest will show you the appropriate way to enter this information.
10. Let your deacon or priest and pastoral care coordinator (if any) know of your visit and of any further needs the ill parishioner has. You need to ensure that the clergy know the situation of the person(s) you visited. But some of what occurred and was said may be expected to be confidential; you need to clarify, both with the clergy and with the person to whom you have ministered, what communication may be made to other parishioners about your visit.

Sources and Recommended Reading

The Book of Occasional Services 2003, Church Publishing, New York, 2004

The Constitution and Canons for the Government of the Protestant Episcopal Church, Church Publishing, New York, 2003

Ely, Beth Wickenberg, *A manual for Lay Eucharistic Ministers in the Episcopal Church*, Moorehouse Publishing, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1991