

Diocese of Springfield Training Guide for Eucharistic Visitors

Canonical Basis

Everything that has already been said about the extraordinary nature of licensed lay ministry with respect to Eucharistic Ministers applies with even greater acuity to Eucharistic Visitors. It is not lay ministry, *per se*, but is delegated clerical ministry. For this reason, both the spirit and the letter of the enabling canons set very strict rules. It is essential that these rules be strictly followed; to do otherwise creates a situation of abuse which can disrupt the good order of the church and confuse the faithful.

The mission of a Eucharistic Visitor is to extend the eucharistic community to those parishioners who have been and desire to continue as regular communicants, but who are prevented by chronic illness or debility from physically attending the liturgy. By having the Blessed Sacrament brought to them in close (virtually immediate) temporal proximity to the celebration of the Eucharist, such persons are able to duly keep the Lord's Day with the larger community of the faithful.

As a Eucharistic Visitor, you will deliver the sacrament persons in such circumstances ...

- ...*directly after the Sunday celebration*. In most instances, Eucharistic Visitors do not even stay for Coffee Hour, but are dismissed with prayer right after the administration of communion. In any case, the visit(s) should be completed on the same day, at the very latest, and not deferred to a weekday.
- ...*to persons in their own homes, or in long-term care facilities*. In other words, the Eucharistic Visitor canons are designed to accommodate those who are *chronically* unable to attend the liturgy. Those who are hospitalized for the usual temporary reasons are not appropriate objects of Eucharistic Visitor ministry, but should be visited by a priest.
- ...*only to those whom your priest has specifically asked you to visit*. This is perhaps one of the few instances in life where imagination and initiative are **not** appropriate! Your priest may be in possession of pastoral information you do not have which would make a visit inadvisable.

Relevant Liturgical/Sacramental Theology

A key New Testament word that affect our understanding of the Eucharist, particularly as it relates to the ministry of a Eucharistic Visitor is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is usually translated “fellowship” or “communion,” but both those English words may be too weak in their connotations. *Koinonia* indicates a profoundly intimate relationship—shared participation in the same life. The Eucharist is Holy Communion—holy *koinonia*—between the communicant and the living Christ, and between the communicant and the rest of the body of the faithful. It connects us “vertically” with God, and “horizontally” with our fellow Christians.

It is for this reason precisely that the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is of such paramount importance, and why attendance at Sunday worship “unless for good cause prevented” is the only mandate of the Episcopal Church’s canon law that is universally binding on all the laity! If it were merely a matter of receiving the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion as a matter of—so to speak—“spiritual hygiene,” then there would scarcely be a need for Eucharistic Visitors. A priest could occasionally celebrate a home Eucharist, or a deacon could regularly bring the reserved sacrament at a convenient time during the week.

What such arrangements fail to account for, however, is the “horizontal” element of the sacrament, *koinonia* with the community of the baptized, assembled for its “work,” its liturgy. Maintaining a connection with this dimension of the Eucharist is what the ministry of a Eucharistic Visitor makes possible. By bringing the sacrament, as it were, “fresh” from the altar, the Eucharistic Visitor is a living extension of the eucharistic community, a human bridge connecting the homebound parishioner with the community he or she longs to be part of.

Spirituality & Practice of Pastoral Care-Giving

Effective pastoral ministry—whether exercised by an ordained minister, or by a lay person such as a Eucharistic Visitor—is more an art than a science. Your supervising priest will coach you and serve as a mentor as you develop your technique in this new “artistic” endeavor. The following considerations may be helpful in this context:

- *You represent the wider church.* This may seem so obvious that it need not be repeated. Yet, it is easily forgotten. You are there as a human presence, visiting another real human being, so you should be authentic, i.e. “be yourself.” At the same time, however, you are “more” than yourself. You are a living icon of the whole community of the Church. You literally re-present that innumerable community in your own person when you are functioning in your ministry. This is serious business! It is a matter of stewardship—something precious which has been entrusted to you.
- *Communicate confidence and peace.* The person you are visiting is probably anxious about a great many things. Your job is to be a non-anxious presence. Leave your own anxieties on the doorstep—particularly those that relate to parish politics and similar issues.
- *Stay on task.* A small amount of chit-chat, small talk, is OK, and probably even necessary. More than a small amount, however, will over-personalize your visit, and obscure its primary purpose. If you just want to have a visit for the sake of a personal visit, come back another time when you are not wearing your Eucharistic Visitor “hat.” Remember, too, that those who are homebound may tire easily, yet be too gracious to tell you. On the other hand, they may be starving for company, and quite willing to drain

you dry in one sitting! So it is important to set clear and appropriate boundaries in your own mind, and stick to them.

- *Keep confidences*—but try to avoid situations where they might be shared. There is sometimes a fine line between healthy confidences and unhealthy secrets. Secrets can poison the “family system” of a parish, and even the homebound are part of that system! The best course is to stick to your job: deliver the sacrament, be kind and compassionate, but resist being drawn into “fixing” things in the person’s life.

Applicable Liturgical Form

The form for the administration of Holy Communion by a Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Minister is found in the *Book of Occasional Services*. This is the only authorized form, and you should be intimately familiar with its text, rubrics, and guidelines. (Questions from this material will be included on the examination.) The order for *Communion Under Special Circumstances* in the Prayer Book is **not** intended for use by Eucharistic Visitors.

- Officiating at this rite will require, at the very least, that you know how to locate the Collect of the Day in the Prayer Book, and the appropriate gospel reading in the lectionary.
- Ask your supervising cleric for guidance about making “comments” on the sermon that was delivered at the liturgy.
- Note that use of the Confession of Sin is permissive, not mandatory. During festival seasons, it is not inappropriate to omit the confession. Also, for reasons of pastoral expediency, you may decide not to include it.