

Touchstones for Liturgical Ministries:



For Ministers of Communion

By Melissa Kay

You have been called to a most beautiful ministry. Time taken to reflect on its meaning and practice will deeply enrich your own awareness of the mystery of Christ and that of the people you serve.

The communion rite is the heart and center -- the ritual climax -- of the entire Eucharistic liturgy. The gathering of the community, the proclamation of God's word, the remembering and thanksgiving and offering in the Eucharistic prayer -- all are directed toward the moment of communion in which we many, fed with his own body and blood, are made one in the Lord.

As St. Augustine wrote: "Would you understand the body of Christ? Hear the Apostle saying to the faithful: '**You are the body and members of Christ.**' **If, then, you are Christ's body and his members, it is your own mystery which you receive.** It is to what you are that you reply 'Amen,' and by replying subscribe. For you are told, 'The body of Christ,' and you reply, 'Amen.' Be a member of the body of Christ and let your 'Amen' be true."

The communion into which Jesus invites us is a personal communion, a communion of persons. It is your ministry to make the moment of communion as personable as possible. **A primary qualification for ministers of communion, then, in light of the above, is that they be by nature interested in, caring about, at ease with other people -- without regard for status in the community or for distinctions of class, sex, age or race.** All who gather at the table of the Lord do so as sisters and brothers in the Lord, and must be welcomed there as such. An important principle for ministers of communion is **do not rush.** Allow this moment its full ritual beauty.

This is not a ministry for efficiency experts, nor for those who are unable to look another in the eye with comfort or to touch another person with ease. **Nothing is more important in this ministry than the ability to focus your attention on the person to whom you are ministering.** The meeting of minister and communicant is only for a moment. If you are looking down the approaching line or scanning the congregation instead of giving full attention to the

person before you, half the value of the encounter will be lost. You must be able to disregard everything and everyone else in that moment, to look at the person before you with undivided attention. The look should be one of warmth and friendliness. you are greeting a brother or sister in Christ.

Speak to that person -- not to the air or to the bread or to the cup. Hold up the bread or the cup and, looking the person in the eye, say, "The body of Christ" or "The Blood of Christ." [We do not recommend saying names unless you know everyone's name, so that no one is left out.] Wait for his or her response; "Amen." The meeting will be even more personal if hands touch in the act of ministering.

Your reverence for the persons you serve and for the sacrament will show itself in all your actions. In the way you walk (slowly, with dignity) as you approach the altar, usually during the breaking of the bread.... **Whatever you do, do it with care and attention.** ... This is not a business transaction remember, but a family meal, an act of personal communion. ...

You who serve in the ministry of communion are exercising the role of hosts and servants at the Eucharistic banquet. ...

The liturgy of the Eucharist is never self-contained but in its deepest meaning reaches out to all the world, to the feeding of the hungry and the healing of the afflicted. Those who carry holy communion to the sick and persons otherwise confined, therefore, continue the community's act of worship, extending its embrace to include those unable to be physically present. And so it is most fitting that they go directly from the assembly's Sunday Eucharist; sending them forth to do this ministry.

From Touchstones for Liturgical Ministers (*out of print*)

© The Liturgical Conference

8750 Georgia Avenue, Suite 123

Silver Spring, Md. 20910

All rights reserved. Used with permission.