

OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

ARCHDIOCESE OF LOUISVILLE

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Sharing in the Dignity of the Image of God

(Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 364)

Letter of His Excellency, Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre, concerning

Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite

To all the faithful of the particular church of Louisville

Greetings in the Lord!

In the Holy Eucharist, we find the entirety of the Church's spiritual blessings, for it contains Christ himself, the living Bread that imparts life to humanity. As the precious gift of the Eucharist holds a significant place within the Sacred Liturgy, I write to you, the people of God in the particular church of Louisville, to promote unity and reverence for the Eucharist and to establish clear norms concerning (1) the posture of the Assembly during the distribution of Holy Communion, (2) the posture of each individual communicant at the time of his or her reception of the Sacrament, and (3) the communicant's choice of the manner of receiving Holy Communion.

1. **Posture of the Assembly during the distribution of Holy Communion.** In this local church, the previously recommended practice was to stand throughout the entire distribution of Holy Communion. While commendable, this is not the norm in most places throughout the United States and has led to some confusion and disunity. **Therefore, the practice will be for the faithful to kneel after the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) and remain kneeling until joining the Communion procession. After receiving Holy Communion, the faithful return to their places and kneel, or sit if unable, for a period of thanksgiving and personal prayer** (cf. *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 43; Prot. N. 855/03/L).

2. **Posture of Individuals while receiving Holy Communion.** Standing is the norm for the reception of Holy Communion. While standing, the communicant bows his or her head before receiving the Body of the Lord or the Precious Blood. While communicants may not be denied Holy Communion because they may kneel, catechesis of the faithful (such as sacramental preparation) should instruct that standing is the normative posture for reception of Holy Communion. Deacons, servers, and other liturgical ministers are to observe the normative posture of standing to receive Holy Communion to appropriately

model this norm for the faithful (*cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, no. 160; Prot. N. 1322/02/L).

3. Manners of Receiving Holy Communion. Communicants may choose whether to receive the consecrated Host in the hand or on the tongue. Since the Church presents these as equally appropriate options, catechesis on this point may not indicate that either method is better, preferred, or more reverent than the other. As the choice is reserved to the communicant, no minister may require that the faithful receive the consecrated Host in a certain way. The faithful receive the Precious Blood by drinking directly from the Chalice after it is handed to them by the minister. Intinction, while possible in some circumstances, is not a normative practice for distribution to the faithful at Masses within the Archdiocese of Louisville. Deacons and the lay faithful may never intinct the Host themselves (*cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, nos. 160, 249, 287; Norms nos. 48, 50).

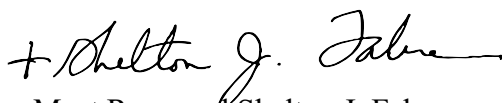
As always, pastoral adaptations should be made for those who cannot take the normative postures due to physical limitations.

These norms and clarifications may be implemented at any time, but no later than June 22, 2025 – the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. Pastors are encouraged to ensure that catechesis and preparation are provided for the faithful in our parishes. To that end, a more detailed explanation of all these points is included separately. Please share it with catechetical and liturgical leaders in your parishes. The Archdiocesan Office of Worship and Office of Faith Formation remain available to you to answer any questions and provide further catechetical support.

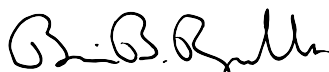
May the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, from whom the Lord took flesh, intercede for us as we continue to cultivate the awareness that the work of our redemption is happening most of all during our celebration of the Eucharist.

Given in Louisville, from the chancery, this fourteenth day of May,
on the Feast of Saint Matthias, Apostle,
in the year of Our Lord two thousand and twenty-five.

Sincerely in Christ,



Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Archbishop of Louisville



Dr. Brian B. Reynolds
Chancellor



Sharing in the Dignity of the Image of God

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Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite

The following document presents a more in-depth look at the changes and clarifications on posture and other issues related to procedures for Holy Communion as indicated in the letter from Archbishop Fabre concerning *Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite*. This document may be of particular use to parish catechetical and liturgical leaders. Further, the process of consulting the priest council and deaneries on *Norms* surfaced questions related to other procedures for Holy Communion (e.g. purification of sacred vessels, use of pyxes, communicating from the tabernacle). Clarification on these points is also included in this document. Changes are to be implemented by the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ – June 22, 2025.

The postures we take during the Mass contribute to the expression of our prayer and are part of our full, conscious and active participation in the liturgy.

During the Communion Rite, there are several postures and gestures of great importance. The ritual books and liturgical documents call for a certain uniformity of posture that expresses our unity, but they also allow for some legitimate variations. This document outlines policy for the local Church concerning three issues of posture during the Communion Rite: (1) the posture of the Assembly during the distribution of Holy Communion; (2) the posture of each individual communicant at the time of his or her reception of the Sacrament; (3) the communicant's choice of the manner of receiving Holy Communion and catechesis surrounding this choice. Finally, there are notes on other procedures for Holy Communion: (1) purification of sacred vessels; (2) taking Holy Communion to the sick and homebound and the use of pyxes at Mass for this purpose; (3) the appropriate use of the tabernacle during Mass.

These instructions are intended for the celebration of Mass in the Roman Rite according to current Roman Missal, without prejudice to the rubrics of the 1962 Roman Mass (celebrated only at the Shrine of St. Martin of Tours in Louisville and at Our Lady of the Caves in Horse Cave), the Ordinate form (celebrated at St. Francis of Assisi in Louisville), and other ritual forms where they are legitimately celebrated within the Archdiocese of Louisville.

In implementing these and all postures of the liturgy, pastoral adaptations are appropriate for persons with limitations, such as the elderly, those with ailing bodies, parents who need to carry

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children, or those who for whatever physical reason are unable to participate in the normative posture. When Mass is celebrated outside of churches and oratories where there are no kneelers (such as hotels, conference centers, and gymnasiums), all should stand during the Eucharistic Prayer and Invitation to Communion and sit at all other times when kneeling is indicated.

1. Posture of the Assembly during the distribution of Holy Communion.

The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* [*GIRM*] No. 43 addresses posture during Mass. It indicates that the faithful kneel after the *Agnus Dei*, but instructions are less clear about when the assembly stands after that and for how long they remain standing. The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued some clarification, stating that *GIRM* no. 43 “is intended, on one hand, to ensure within broad limits a certain uniformity of posture within the congregation for the various parts of the celebration of the Holy Mass, and on the other, to not regulate posture rigidly in such a way that those who wish to kneel or sit would no longer be free” (*Prot. n. 855/03/L*).

GIRM no. 43 also gives the Diocesan Bishop authority to interpret and regulate these postures for his diocese. It was previously recommended as a best practice that the entire assembly stand throughout the entire distribution of Holy Communion. While there is merit to this interpretation, it is not the practice in most churches in the United States and can consequently be confusing to visitors. Therefore, in the Archdiocese of Louisville, the assembly remains kneeling after the *Agnus Dei*.

Communicants stand when it is their turn to join the Communion procession. After returning to the pew, each then kneels, or sits if unable, for a period of thanksgiving and personal prayer.

It is appropriate for all to sit once the remaining Hosts have been returned to the tabernacle or taken out of the sanctuary to the place of reservation. The assembly is seated during the purification of vessels, if this occurs during Mass. The rubrics of the Mass call for a period of “sacred silence” after the distribution of Holy Communion is concluded. This is to be duly observed, so that all may have an opportunity to reflect and give thanks for the great gift of the Eucharist. The faithful will then stand for the Prayer after Communion, as is customary.

2. Posture of Individuals While Receiving Holy Communion.

Our conference of bishops has clearly designated “standing” as the posture for receiving either the Sacred Body or the Precious Blood: “The norm established for the dioceses of the United States is that Communion is to be received standing, unless an individual member wishes to receive Communion while kneeling” (*GIRM* no.160).

Communicants who choose to kneel to receive the Sacrament are not to be denied Holy Communion on those grounds: “the faithful should not be imposed upon nor accused of disobedience and of acting illicitly when they kneel to receive Holy Communion” (Prot. n. 1322/02/L). However, Eucharistic catechesis of the faithful (such as preparations for First Holy Communion and *Order of Christian Initiation of Adults* [OCIA]) should clearly instruct that standing is the normative posture for reception of Holy Communion in the United States. One of the reasons we stand during the liturgy is to express reverence. For example, we stand for the proclamation of the Gospel to honor the presence of Jesus Christ in his words and the accounts of his life. Likewise, standing for the distribution of Holy Communion shows a profound reverence for the presence of Christ in the consecrated Body and Blood and for his presence in the other members of the Body of Christ. Through such catechesis, all are encouraged to stand.

While standing, the communicant bows his or her head before receiving the Sacred Host and, once more, before receiving the Precious Blood. The bow of the head is the only gesture of reverence indicated in the current liturgical books.

Deacons, servers, and other liturgical ministers present in the sanctuary are to observe the normative posture of standing to receive Holy Communion to be good models for the faithful while they serve in these visible liturgical ministries.

Churches may not set up kneelers for the Communion line or establish a procedure for distributing Holy Communion behind a communion rail. Such practices communicate an expectation that the faithful should kneel.

3. **Manners of Receiving.**

“The communicant may choose whether to receive the Body of Christ in the hand or on the tongue” (*Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America* [Norms] no. 41; *GIRM* no. 160). Both practices have an ancient and venerable tradition. In ancient times and until around 800, the faithful took the divine food in their hands and placed it in their mouths themselves. This practice is described in the writings of early Church fathers, such as Tertulian, Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Basil the Great. In the centuries since, the development of the priestly ministry led to the practice of the priest placing the Host on the tongue of the communicant.

In the 1969 instruction *Memoriale Domini*, the Holy See granted permission for bishops’ conferences to allow the practice of distributing Holy Communion in the hand, while the practice of Communion on the tongue was to be retained. Current liturgical documents for the United States present these as equally legitimate and acceptable options. Since the Church does not indicate a preference, catechesis on this point (such as preparations for

First Holy Communion and *OCIA*) should teach both methods and may not indicate that either method is better, preferred, or “more reverent” than the other. Furthermore, this choice is for the communicant. Neither churches nor individual Communion ministers may restrict the faithful by requiring that they receive the Host in a certain way.

When Communion is received in the hand, “special care should be taken to ensure that the Host is consumed by the communicant in the presence of the minister,” to avoid the possibility of profanation (*Redemptionis Sacramentum* no. 92).

The faithful receive the Precious Blood from the Chalice by drinking directly from the Chalice after it is handed to them by the minister. Intinction, while possible in some circumstances, is not to be a normative practice for distribution of Holy Communion to the faithful within the Archdiocese of Louisville. “Intinction” is the practice of dipping the consecrated Host into the Precious Blood. The correct manner of distributing via intinction is described in *GIRM* no. 287. It requires the use of a Communion plate under the mouth. The priest takes a Host, intincts it in the Chalice and, showing it, says, “The Body and Blood of Christ.” The communicant then receives the intincted Host on the tongue. The priest celebrant or concelebrants may also receive by way of intinction, where the priest himself dips the Host into the Precious Blood and self-communicates. Deacons and the lay faithful, however, may never intinct the Host themselves (*GIRM* no. 249; *Norms* no. 48-50).

Norms for Posture and the Communion Rite

ADDENDA

Purification of Sacred Vessels.

Purification, the process of collecting and consuming any remaining fragments from the sacred vessels, is done by the deacon or, if there is no deacon, by the priest himself. It may also be done by an instituted acolyte, but not by extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The purification of the vessels may take place after the distribution of Holy Communion. It is also permitted to leave the vessels needing to be purified on a corporal, suitably covered, on the credence table, and to purify them immediately after Mass.

The purification of vessels should not unduly prolong the Communion Rite. Because of the length of most Masses when the bishop is present, Archbishop Shelton prefers the purification of vessels to occur after Mass and recommends this as a best practice for parishes, particularly when there are many vessels to purify.

Purification by a deacon is done at a side table or in the sacristy. A priest may purify the vessels on the altar, but not in the center of the altar (*GIRM* no. 163, 183, 247, 279; *Norms* no. 51-55).

2. Communion to the Sick and the use of Pyxes at Mass.

It is the duty of the priest or deacon to bring Holy Communion to the faithful who wish to receive it and who cannot be present at the Eucharistic celebration. They may be assisted in this role, as needed, by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion who are properly formed for that ministry and who have received training and a subsequent mandate from the archdiocese. All who take Holy Communion to the sick or homebound must be properly formed ordinary or extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion. The Office of Worship regularly offers formation for this ministry and can provide parishes with formation materials if they wish to offer their own training sessions.

When Communion is taken to the sick directly from Mass, this should be coordinated before Mass begins. It is most appropriate for the pyxes to be filled with the needed number of Hosts and placed on the credence table. They will then be placed on the altar at the Preparation of Gifts and consecrated along with the other elements. At the end of distribution of Communion, the ministers to the sick are called forward, given their pyxes, and dismissed immediately. Alternately, pyxes can be collected after Mass. In either case, the minister goes directly to the sick or homebound person with the Blessed Sacrament and celebrates the ritual of Communion to the Sick found in the appropriate liturgical books. It is never appropriate to leave the Blessed Sacrament in the pyx unattended or to keep it in one's home or car for any period of time.

It is not appropriate for pyxes to be presented in the Communion line. When this occurs, the minister should discretely ask the communicant to speak to the priest following Mass. At that time, a conversation about the need for pastoral care can take place, the proper procedure can be explained, and Hosts can be retrieved from the tabernacle, if appropriate. (*Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery Outside Mass* no. 17; *Pastoral Care of the Sick* no. 72)

3. The Tabernacle at Mass

The primary purpose of reservation in the tabernacle is the administration of Viaticum and Communion for the sick. It is not appropriate to routinely distribute Holy Communion at Mass from the Hosts reserved in the tabernacle. As a general rule and particularly at Sunday Mass, Holy Communion is given from the Hosts consecrated at the same Mass. The Hosts in the tabernacle may be used at Mass in case of emergency need. After distribution at Mass, remaining Hosts can be consumed or reserved in the tabernacle as needed for the ministries of the Church. If necessary, they may also be distributed at a weekday Mass. (*GIRM* no. 85; *Norms* no. 30; *Eucharisticum Mystrium* no. 31)