

Policy on Holy Communion Outside of Mass
Diocese of Phoenix
September 15, 2007

Four documents govern the distribution of Holy Communion outside of Mass. These are: *Holy Communion Outside of Mass* (1973); *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (1993); *Redemptionis Sacramentum* (2004); and *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (2007). As in the case of most liturgical law, principles contained in latter documents supersede or refine earlier principles because of the lived experience of the Church.

1) The 1974 rite is to be used only in non-parish settings (such as prisons, nursing homes, hospitals, etc) when Mass cannot be celebrated or the faithful cannot legitimately attend Mass in a Parish. The distribution of Holy Communion outside of mass in this rite seeks to link people who are unable to attend Mass on Sunday to the parish Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The celebrant of this rite is the priest, deacon or instituted acolyte. Lay ministers can be given faculties by the bishop to perform this ceremony.

2) The rites described in *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* are very limited in their use. Option A includes morning or evening prayer with the distribution of Holy Communion; Option B is a service of the Word with distribution of Holy Communion. These rites are to be used only on Sundays, when no Mass will be celebrated in a parish or mission. They may not be used if the faithful may reasonably attend Mass at another parish or location. These rites may be used only when and where the diocesan bishop has given permission and under the guidance of a canonical pastor. Great care and proper instruction must be given the community before the use of either option so that the faithful do not confuse this celebration with Mass. Only a deacon or a lay person appointed by the bishop may perform the rite. Preaching is only allowed with proper delegation from the bishop. The community should understand that “their assembly on Sunday is not an assembly without a priest”. . . “but an assembly in expectation of a priest”.

3) *Redemptionis Sacramentum* places greater restrictions on the use of either the rite of 1974 or that of 1993. This document has three concerns: 1) that the above rites have been used indiscriminately without proper permissions and for reasons outside the original intent; 2) that the use of the above rites have created confusion among the laity as to what they were participating in; and 3) that the importance of full active participation by the faithful in the Eucharistic celebration (Sunday Obligation) has become equated with receiving Holy Communion.

Several emphases have changed in this latest document: 1) rather than give permission for Communion Services on Sunday, the diocesan bishop is encouraged to find religious or retired priests to say Mass at parishes (missions) without a full time priest or the laity is encouraged to join nearby churches for Sunday Mass or holy days(#162, 163); 2) permission for deacons or laity to offer other services on Sunday must be seen as extraordinary for each locale; these Sunday services must inspire a “hunger” for the Eucharistic celebration and do not necessarily include the distribution of Holy Communion (#164); 3) if confusion is created among the faithful over the rite they are attending, then Holy Communion should not be distributed (#165); 4) if Holy Communion is distributed and the rite is led by the

laity, then the rite should be carried out by several members lest it seem that one is “presiding”;

5) though priests should celebrate daily Mass for their congregations as often as possible, the bishop must not easily give permission for communion services on weekdays if there is a Sunday celebration in the parish (#166).

4) In light of #3 above the USCCB has issued a revised version of *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (2007). This latest document makes clear that Sunday celebrations with or without communion can only take place with the permission of the bishop and may never happen at a place where Sunday Mass has been celebrated that weekend. Such celebrations are for parishes that only see a priest once or twice a month. They help those parishes maintain Sunday as the Day of the Lord, but do not fulfill the obligation of Catholics to attend Mass on Sunday.

In light of the above, the following will serve as policy for the celebration of communion services in the Diocese of Phoenix.

- 1) For the faithful who cannot legitimately attend Mass (nursing homes, hospitals, prisons, etc.), communion services may be offered by the person(s) appointed by the pastor or office who has jurisdiction over these institutions. When these take place during the week and not on Sunday, the rite found in the Pastoral Care of the Sick is used. If possible, pastors should make every effort to arrange for the celebration of Mass at such institutions within his care on a regular basis (monthly).
- 2) If a priest is absent from his parish during the week and cannot find a substitute, a service of the Word or the liturgy of the hours, should be prayed instead of a communion service. The rite of 1974 may not be used. If someone is not available to conduct a liturgy of the Word or the liturgy of the hours, a rosary may be prayed.
- 3) As a rule of thumb, *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* should never be celebrated in metropolitan Phoenix. In the extraordinary event that a priest had to miss a Sunday Mass at his parish, and knowing this in advance could not find a substitute, he should publish Mass times of surrounding parishes.
- 4) In parishes without a resident priest, the canonical pastor of a parish (mission) may petition the bishop for permission that *Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest* may take place. He should name the deacon or lay persons for whom he is requesting permission. Sunday services may or may not include the distribution of Holy Communion depending on the permission of the bishop.
- 5) Where permission has been granted for the use of the rite *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*, every effort should be made by the canonical pastor or administrator to schedule Mass for the faithful at some regular interval (monthly or quarterly)
- 6) In an emergency (e.g., a priest gets sick before Mass, an assigned priest does not show up for mass on a Sunday), *Sunday Celebration* may be performed by a deacon or other person delegated by the pastor, if not other Sunday Mass is scheduled in the parish. The Dean must be notified that such a celebration has taken place.

Appendix 2
Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest
Comparison of Editions

Introduction	1994 Ritual	2007 Ritual
Sunday and its Observance	1-5	1-5
SCAP	6-9	6-13 Sunday obligation added
Conditions for Holding SCAP	10-13	14-17 may not be held in a community where Mass has been celebrated at another time during the weekend
Bishop	14-16	18-20
Pastor	17	21-22 provide frequent opportunities for Mass and renew consecrated hosts often.
Deacon	18-20	23-25 Deacon may not use the presidential chair
Laypersons	21-24	26-38 (nine additional paragraph's have been included about the role of the Lay Leader of Prayer including four paragraph's on preaching)
Forms the celebration may take	25-26	39-41 Holy Communion is permitted but not required
LOH <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;">Liturgy of the Hours</div>	27-31 (see also 52-121)	42-46 (see also 118-185) Profession of Faith added, one psalm and one canticle may be omitted, Act of thanksgiving is <i>Benedictus</i> or <i>Magnificat</i> and follows Communion rite.
LOW <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; width: fit-content; margin: 5px auto;">Liturgy of the Word</div>	32-36 (see also 122-158)	47-51 prayers from Roman Missal are included in Appendix III of ritual (see also 186-216)
Individual Parts of the Celebration	37-49	52-65
Introductory Rites	37 (see also 122-127) Inform the assembly where pastor is celebrating Eucharist, opening song and procession, separate greeting for lay leader and deacon Litany of Praise for God's Mercy, opening prayer from Roman Missal	52 (see also 186-189) Reminder to use provided text which reminds assembly the service in conducted in the absence of a priest, no opening song, same greeting for deacon and lay leader, no Litany of Praise for God's Mercy, opening prayer from Roman Missal optional, new opening prayers with seasonal inserts based on <i>Dies</i>

Introduction	1994 Ritual	2007 Ritual
		<i>Domini</i> of John Paul II
Psalmody	38	53
LOW	39–42 pastor may prepare a homily to be read	54–57 should be an explanation of the readings
Act of Thanksgiving	43–44 twenty-seven options, comes before the Communion rite	58–59 follows the Communion rite when Communion is distributed, seventeen options only
Communion Rite	45–49 includes sign of peace, minister self communicates	60–63 sign of peace moved to concluding rites, minister, both deacon and lay leader receives Communion from another minister
Concluding Rites	49	64–65 prayer for vocations to the priesthood added, Sign of Peace concludes service—community is sent forth in mission.
Preparation for the Sunday Celebration	50–51	66–117 includes new section of ritual books, liturgical year, music and silence

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Appendix 3

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REFLECTIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF A COMMUNION SERVICE

This paper clarifies the distinctions between liturgical Eucharistic celebrations and communion services.

It asserts the value of the Eucharistic liturgy as central to our faith, its “source and summit.”

It reflects on the relationship of the Eucharist to a communion service as an extension of the grace, presence, prayer and care of Christ and his body – the assembly- either to those who were absent from the Eucharistic celebration and its actions of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread and wine.

It provides background for further reflection on and the evaluation of communion services.

1. Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.

The ritual book “Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass (1973) values the reception of Communion outside Mass and establishes its close relationship to the Eucharistic Liturgy which “is truly the origin and the goal of the worship which is shown to Eucharist outside Mass.” (HCWEOM #2) Furthermore, prayer before the reserved Eucharist “cannot but deepen the interiority of active participation in the celebration of Mass.”

The primary concern of HCWEOM, writes Everett A. Diederich S.J. in the *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, “is to promote Eucharistic devotion and worship outside Mass by integrating it both doctrinally and liturgically with the celebration of the Eucharist.” The challenge is twofold: “In order to direct and to encourage devotion to the sacrament of the Eucharist correctly, the Eucharistic mystery must be considered in all its fullness, both in the celebration of Mass and in the worship of the sacrament which is reserved after Mass to extend the grace of the sacrifice (HCWEOM #4). A poorly done communion service, therefore, will adversely affect the Eucharistic Liturgy-and visa versa.

2. The Paradigm for the Eucharistic Liturgy is the Sunday Mass.

Sunday Eucharist is the key. Although every celebration of Eucharist, whether on Sunday or a weekday reflect the relationship of unity of all the baptized led by their bishop, “because of its special solemnity and the obligatory presence of the community, and because it is celebrated on the day when Christ conquered death and gave us a share in his immortal life, ‘the Sunday Eucharist’ expresses with greater emphasis its inherent ecclesial dimension. It becomes the paradigm for other Eucharistic celebrations” (Dies Domini p.26).

3. The Paradigm for the Reception of Communion is the Eucharistic Liturgy

The relationship of a Communion Service to the Eucharistic liturgy is clear, “Sacramental communion received during Mass is the more perfect participation in the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharistic sign is expressed more clearly when the faithful receive the body of the Lord from the same sacrifice after the communion of the priest,” (HCWEOM). This is why the directive in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2000) that the faithful, should ordinarily receive bread consecrated at the Eucharistic celebration they attend is so critically important.

4. Extending the Grace of Eucharist – Eucharist as Source and Summit

The use of the phrase “to extend the grace of the sacrifice” in HCWEOM, affirms paragraph #10 of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy: “[T]he liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; [and] it is the fount from which all the Church’s power flows. The liturgy moves the faithful to be “one in holiness.”

Peter Fink, S.J. expands upon this concept as he describes the relationship between Eucharist and the communion service in the *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*: “From its earliest days the church has been concerned to extend the Eucharist beyond the assembly,” to the sick, dying, and to the “partial assembly (e.g., to partake of communion) and thus continue in another time and –place the church’s Eucharistic action.” “Such extension is *communio* the full sense of the work: union with Christ and union with the *ecclesia* of Christ. It is an extension of presence, of prayer and of care...All such extensions beyond the assembly have their root in the Eucharistic assembly itself, and all such extensions are directed toward the Eucharistic assembly as well” (NDSW 422). This extension of presence, prayer and care, as expressive of the relationship of Eucharist liturgy to communion service, might well be expanded to include other liturgical and devotional prayer forms. The goal of being “one in holiness” as stated in the Constitution on the Sacred liturgy and the baptismal “call to holiness” of *Lumen Gentium* find expression in multiple prayer forms both communal and private beyond the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist.

For instance, describing the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours before the Blessed Sacrament, the *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist* says: “This liturgy extends the praise and thanksgiving offered to God in the Eucharistic celebration to the several hours of the day” (#16). Other examples may be found. In short, all forms of Catholic prayer, if they are to be part of the total prayer life of the community, must reflect the Sunday celebration of the Eucharistic Liturgy as its “source and summit.” Devotional practices are included as the “Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy” from the Congregation for Divine Worship (2001) makes clear.

5. Maintaining a Connection-First Step

How do communities maintain a strong connection between the Eucharistic liturgy and the communion service? A first step would be for presider and community to share an understanding of the relationship of communion service to the Eucharistic Liturgy and the specific distinctions between one and the other. By understanding the distinctions, perhaps it is easier to strengthen certain aspect so the relationship of extension from Eucharistic liturgy to communion service.

Theologians agree that while receiving a previously consecrated host at a communion service is a praiseworthy practice, theologically it is not the same as celebrating the Eucharist and receiving communion in that context. Fr. Gerard Austin, OP, discusses four areas of distinction in his article on Communion Services found in the “Fountain of Life” collection. His focus is on the difficulties involved in Sunday celebrations in the understanding of the relationship of Eucharist to other prayer forms.

B. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN EUCHARISTIC LITURGY AND COMMUNION SERVICES

1. Eucharistic Liturgy in an Action

The Eucharistic Liturgy is an action of the people of God led by an ordained presider. The liturgy reminds us of God’s saving actions and allows us to join our offering to Christ’s so that we may become more and more one with Christ and with one another. According to the General Instructions of the Roman Missal, in the Eucharistic Prayer “the faithful...give thanks to the Father and offer the victim not only through the hands of the priest but also together with him and lean to offer themselves.” These actions of the Eucharistic liturgy are not part of a communion service and therefore set the communion service apart from the Eucharistic liturgy.

In contrast, the Communion Service points to the consecrated bread as an extension of the action celebrated at the Eucharistic liturgy where the bread was consecrated as the Body of Christ. One way of summarizing the differences, then, between Mass and communion service is that at Mass we engage in “holy actions.” In the communion service we focus on “holy things.”

2. Eucharist invokes the Action of the Holy Spirit

In the *epiclesis* of the Eucharistic prayer, the community under the leadership of the priest, calls upon the Holy Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. In the second part of the *epiclesis*, the community, again through the priest presider, calls upon the Holy Spirit to transform all gathered into the body of Christ, the people of God.

While the communion service may remind us that this has occurred previously, it does not engage the assembly in the prayer for such a transformation of the elements of bread and wine or of the gathered assembly. The prayer was made at another time, in another place.

3. Word Flows to Conclusion in the Eucharistic Sacrament

The General instruction describes the Eucharistic Liturgy as a relationship of Word and Sacrament “so closely tied that they form but one sacrament.” In the Word of Scripture and the homily we hear the voice of Christ among us preaching God’s message. We hear the divine covenant announced. In the liturgy, this Word is acted upon in the Eucharist where we offer ourselves with the presider as Christ did. In doing so, we renew our covenant with God. The Word brings to mind the history of salvation; the Eucharist embodies that history in sacramental signs.

The communion service includes Scripture and the remainder of God's gracious acts. However, the renewal of the covenant is not enacted through the offering of ourselves joined to Christ's offering in the Eucharistic action.

4. Unity with God and the Body of Christ

The ultimate purpose of the Eucharist is the eventual; "joyful union" with God and each other in the Body of Christ as Thomas Aquinas and other theologians has written. We seek to be united to God as Jesus was united to his Father on Calvary, through his complete surrender to the Father's will. In the Eucharistic prayer, we renew our commitment to become like Christ. In this sense, we understand the meaning of "sacrifice" to be a yielding to God's will so that we may be in "joyful union" with him and each other. At Eucharist we celebrate that reality as a present reality that is not fully realized. A communion service may remind us of this reality but it does not celebrate it ritually and sacramentally.

Using Scholastic terminology to define the three layers of meaning present in sacraments, Fr. Austin conveys that the theology of the communion service can cause us to stop short of the end point of the sacrament, the ultimate joyful union with God. Following is a very brief summary: The term *sacramentum* was used by Scholastics to describe the external rite, the "matter and form," which by its nature leads to something further. In Eucharist this is the consecrated bread and wine, the sacramental signs. The term *res et sacramentum* describes an intermediate reality, something in its own right that points to something further. This is the "real presence" in these sacramental signs. The term *res sacramenti* described the final reality that was signified by the earlier terms, the ultimate purpose of the sacrament. In the case of Eucharist, the ultimate purpose is final unity with the mystical body of Christ.

Austin notes that post-Tridentine theology emphasized the real presence to such an extent that it seemed to become an end in itself and not something oriented toward the ultimate purpose of the sacrament (*res sacramenti*), union with the Body of Christ. He reminds us that the practice of reserving the host was to commune those too ill or infirm to be at the Sunday liturgy and not as a replacement of Sunday liturgy.

This history may serve to warn us of the danger of multiplying communion services. The reception of the "real presence," can become the end point of the celebration rather than a mean to move toward the ultimate reality (*res sacramenti*) of unity with God in which we engage in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

5. Maintaining Connections – A Second Step

A second step in maintaining strong links between Eucharistic Liturgy and Communion Services may be to review the values essential for liturgical celebration as expressed in the *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*. The Directory maintains that when these values are lost to an assembly, a breakdown of a correct relationship between liturgy and popular piety occurs. Following is a brief summary from the Director of the causes that lead to this breakdown:

1. a weakened awareness or diminished sense of the Paschal mystery and of its centrality for the history of salvation of which the Liturgy is an actualization.

2. a weakening of a sense of the universal priesthood in virtue of which the faithful offer “spiritual sacrifices pleasing to God, through Jesus Christ” and according to their condition, participate fully in the church’s worship. This is often accompanied by the phenomenon of a liturgy dominated by clerics who perform functions not reserved to them.
3. a lack of knowledge of the language proper to liturgy – as well as its signs, symbols and symbolic gestures – causing the meaning of the celebration to escape the greater understanding of the faithful.

6. Concerns about Communion Services

If communion services are not done well; if they do not relate back to the Eucharistic celebration and draw the assembly back to the renewal of the covenant that occurs at the Eucharistic celebration, then the service ceases to be a communal prayer which is truly integrated theologically and liturgically with the liturgy. It then loses its effectiveness as a true extension of presence, concern and care of the Eucharistic community.

Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM, has said that at a communion service it is possible that “those receiving holy communion are more focused on the individual reception of Christ into their hearts than they are focused on this community dimension of the Eucharist”. Of course, this can happen at Mass as well. Since the ultimate purpose of Eucharist is our union with Christ and one another, this “both/and” nature of Eucharist is of critical importance.

Forgetting this dual nature is quite serious says Gerard Austin. “The tradition is that the baptized are to receive communion in the broader context of their celebrating (offering) the Eucharist under the leadership of the priest-celebrant.” This is convincing reason for maintaining a well-celebrated Sunday liturgy. When grounded in a strong Sunday liturgy, communion services may truly act as an extension of the community of presence, prayer and care.

C. CONCLUSION

The communion service allows those who cannot be at Sunday Mass for reasons of age or health to be connected to the assembly. The purpose of communion services is “to deepen Eucharistic faith, faith in Christ’s presence and faith in Christ’s sacrifice, in order to lead those who participate in them to a fuller and more active participation in the church’s Eucharist itself.” If you will, the communion service is a rehearsal for the Eucharistic liturgy. It is not a replacement or substitute for the Eucharistic Liturgy.

The important distinctions between Eucharist and communion service reveal a challenging situation: how to “promote Eucharistic devotion and worship outside Mass” at the ritual; books suggests while also “integrating it both doctrinally and liturgically with the celebration of the Eucharist”.

A true doctrinal and liturgical integration will demand well-crafted celebrations of both Eucharistic Liturgy and Communion Service. This presumes that those seeking communion services come out of a vibrant experience of Eucharistic Liturgy on Sunday and experience

communion services that are led by presiders who have been well-formed in leading communities in prayer. If communities are to be led to celebrate the “fullness of the Eucharist,” continued formation and ongoing opportunities for spiritual development will be needed by those who lead communion services.

1. Adult Education on the Celebration of the Eucharist

Assemblies will need formation as well. An ongoing effort to convey a comprehensive appreciation of the Eucharist is essential. The fundamental concepts of taking, blessing, breaking, sharing; Eucharist as sacrament, an encounter with our Lord and our God; Eucharist as sacrifice, joining our offering of ourselves with Christ’s offering of himself; Eucharist as *anamnesis*, a remembrance of God’s works; Eucharist as worship, giving thanks and praise to God; Eucharist as *koinonia*, fellowship with one another, will expand a narrow perception that focuses on receiving the host alone.

2. Reinforcing the Importance of the Eucharistic Action

The decision to have a communion service should not be made lightly. When daily Mass is available at another parish within a reasonable distance, the assembly’s first option could be to travel to that parish. A reciprocal agreement between the priests of neighboring parishes could help to ensure that daily Mass is available at least at one of the parishes. Needless to say, advance planning and good communication about schedules and changes is essential. This practice presents an added opportunity for the people of one parish to demonstrate hospitality to those of another tend to grow in an understanding of the larger Church.

3. Alternative Forms of Prayer

When a weekday Eucharistic Liturgy is not possible, alternate prayer forms should be considered Morning and evening prayer, i.e., the Liturgy of the Hours, are highly recommended by the Church fathers as a communal prayer form that should be practiced in every parish. Regular experiences of the liturgy of the hours and other communal prayer forms will help assemblies to broaden and enrich their communal prayer experience. In order for this to happen, communities will need to become much more familiar and comfortable with the Liturgy of the Hours as a standard Christian practice. A standard format for morning/evening prayer-even if simplified-groups that meet in the parish, e.g., pastoral council, liturgy group, finance council etc., might introduce a wider audience to the experience of the Church’s ancient practice of communal prayer. This would only enhance the love of the Eucharistic Liturgy.