

Purification of Sacred Vessels by Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

On October 13, 2006 Bishop William Skylstad, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, informed all Bishop members of the conference that he had received a response to his request for an extension of an indult permitting extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist with the purification of sacred vessels at Mass.

In a recent letter to the Conference President, Cardinal Francis Arinze, Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (Prot. no. 468/05/L), reported that he had brought the matter to the attention of our Holy Father on June 9, 2006 and received a response in the negative.

In this letter to all Bishop members of the USCCB, Bishop Skylstad noted that “as a result, it will be necessary to inform all pastors that Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion may no longer assist with the purification of sacred vessels at Mass.” Cardinal Arinze’s letter is provided here for the benefit of our readers, as is a resource entitled “Seven Questions on Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds” to assist Bishops, pastors, diocesan and parish liturgists in the implementation of the Holy Father’s decision.

In public comments on the decision of the Holy Father, Bishop Donald Trautman, Chairman of the Committee on the Liturgy, recalled the conciliar mandate for more frequent reception of Holy Communion under both kinds as a fuller sign of the Eucharistic Banquet. While urging that the Holy Father’s decision be followed, he expressed his hope that each diocesan Bishop will continue to make full use of the authority granted him by the *Missale Romanum, editio typical tertia*, to foster the distribution of Holy Communion under both kinds. Finally, he recalled the responsibility of each pastor to provide for the training of extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion in Eucharistic theology, spirituality and liturgical practice and to instruct the faithful on the ecclesial nature of the Eucharist, the Eucharist as sacrifice and sacred banquet, the real presence of Christ in the eucharistic elements, the kinds of reverence due at all times to the sacrament, and the roles proper to ordinary and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.¹

¹ Cf. *Norms for the Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion under both Kinds*, no. 25.