

The Catholic Church of St Mary the Virgin
(Anglican Use)

Arlington, Texas

Directions for
cup bearer

These directions are supplemental to the “Directions for all altar servers”. Neither takes the place of the other. They must be read together and all directions in both are to be followed.

29 December A. D. 2001

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

General instructions

Your spiritual preparation

All other servers at the Altar are merely assistants to the celebrant, ministering to his immediate needs. The cup bearer assists by doing what the priest himself would do were there not so many communicants for him to minister to, or were there more priests available to assist him. The cup bearer is in fact administering a sacrament of the Church.

Administration of the sacraments is ordinarily reserved to ordained clerics. Even baptism, which can be *validly* administered by anyone at all, even a non-Christian, under canon law is not to be administered by a layman except under conditions of dire necessity. The great imbalance that has arisen in recent years between the number of ordinary clerical ministers of communion and the number of communicants has more or less required the Church to provide for extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. The cup bearer is such an extraordinary minister.

From this discussion it should be evident that among all servers the cup bearer is the most privileged. You have correspondingly great duties, among which is regulating your life so that you are as worthy as you can be to be entrusted with carrying in your mortal hands the Blood of your God. Above all, you must give no scandal to the faithful.

All of this may seem to weigh against the great principle "*ex opere operato*". That principle says that the effect of the sacrament comes from the sacramental action itself, which implies that the efficacy of the sacrament does not depend on the personal holiness of the minister. But what is at stake here is not your effect on the sacrament, but the effect of your example on those who naturally expect those privileged to minister to be worthy of the thing they minister. When a minister of a sacrament is careless of his conduct, he implies negligent contempt of the sacrament he is expected to be living up to. It is bad enough that misconduct may degrade a person in the eyes of others, but worse yet is that the implied contempt for the sacrament may degrade the sacrament itself in the contemplation of those who observe the misconduct. The theological principle "*ex opere operato*" says the sacrament is not degraded, but most of the faithful, even if they know the principle consciously, have at least subconscious difficulty making the distinction. Knowing this possibility of giving scandal, you have a grave responsibility to avoid it.

How to hold the chalice

The function of the cup bearer is to communicate the Precious Blood to communicants. It is prohibited for a communicant to communicate the Precious Blood to himself, even if he is an ordained cleric (unless he is the celebrant or a concelebrant who has consecrated the Sacrament in the species which he is communicating).¹ As a concretely practical matter, this means that the cup bearer

¹This is not an arbitrary point, but this is not the place to explain the theology of the matter in any detail. It must suffice to point out that the essential nature of a sacrament is that it is a *mediation* of grace. By Divine plan, the supernatural comes to us *through* the natural, and taking a sacrament directly instead of through a minister of the visible Church is, so to speak, a short circuit. Indeed, for any of the other of the seven sacraments, there is no question that the

holds the chalice as the communicant drinks from it.² Visitors to St Mary's who are accustomed to taking the cup into their hands at other churches often expect to do the same thing here, but they must not be allowed to do so. So you must always hold the chalice so as to maintain custody and control of it, never allow anyone the opportunity to take it away from you, and, above all else, prevent spillage of the Precious Blood.

The time-tested and most widely accepted grip on the chalice makes use of the "node" or bulge in the stem of the chalice. The method is to extend the third and fourth fingers of your right hand³ away from you while keeping your thumb, index finger, and little finger towards you. Then put the stem in the gap thus created, the index and middle fingers above the node and the ring and little fingers below. Curl all your fingers towards you and you have a secure grip on the chalice. Your little finger is below the node and on the near side of the stem; the ring finger is below the node and on the far side of the stem; the middle finger is above the node and on the far side of the stem; the index finger and the thumb above the node and on the near side of the stem.⁴ This is a secure grip; the chalice is not going to slip out of your hand or be taken from you.

If the chalice has an ablution cross on its base, the chalice should be held so that the cross faces directly to the communicant.

Presenting the cup to the communicant

You first say to the communicant, looking him in the eyes, "The Blood of Christ". Do not vary this formula. Some commentators recommend personalizing the formula by adding the communicant's first name if the minister knows it, but this is exactly wrong. The communion which is the mystical Body of Christ is not made up of us individually but of all of us together. The visible sign of *that* communion is *this* Communion in the Flesh and Blood of Christ, and so although each

sacrament *can't* be administered to oneself.

²We recognize, of course, that at very few Catholic churches in America today is the Precious Blood distributed in this way. The only reason the abuse—and that's what it is—makes any sense at all is because the communicants in those Churches are standing when they receive. At St Mary's everyone receives kneeling and so the only bare excuse for putting the chalice in the hands of the communicant is absent.

³Jesus is presumed to have been right-handed, and so the sacraments are administered using the right hand. A priest may celebrate Mass using his left hand only if he has received an indult from the Holy See.

⁴One of the reasons for this arrangement is that the thumb and forefinger can be kept pressed together. Formerly, it was the discipline that the priest would keep these digits together from the time he consecrated the sacrament until he purified the chalice after communion. If you keep the forefinger and thumb together, and try to grasp the chalice, you will see that there is no way to do it safely except with the fingers arranged as specified here.

of us participates in *this* Communion, the Communion *is* all of us together (including Christ Himself), and so it is inappropriate to seem to make it into an individually personal matter.

The communicant should respond “Amen”, and you should not put the cup to him so quickly as not to allow him time to do so. But if he fails to respond, do not attempt to supply the deficiency or take any notice of it. Because the communicant has already received the Body of Christ from the priest, who has therefore passed judgment on the communicant’s fitness to communicate, including the requisite belief in the Real Presence, you must not concern yourself further.

The rim of the cup is placed gently but securely upon, and right up to the inside edge, of the communicant’s lower lip, and then tilted so that the Precious Blood just comes to the rim of the cup. The communicant should then take a very small sip of the Blood. Immediately withdraw the cup, at the same time bringing it back to an upright position.

Take your time in placing the cup on the communicant’s lip. Getting it in the right position is the key to making it easy for the communicant to take a small sip. Working at a deliberate pace allows this positioning, and besides keeps the Blood from slopping back and forth in the chalice, which threatens spillage.

The communicant is permitted to guide the cup himself, using the thumb and forefinger on the edge of the base of the chalice. Some will use both hands, as if to take the chalice from you. Don’t try to prevent their guiding the cup in this way, but of course do not let them have the chalice or in any way lose control of it. The communicant may guide, but you are still the one who is administering the cup, and you alone are responsible for it.

Besides taking your time in positioning the rim of the cup, you also have to see what you are doing. There are a few circumstances in which this is difficult and a few hints are in order:

1. *The communicant bends the head down when receiving.* Communicants probably do this in order to tilt the cup down to get at the Blood. This can be discouraged by presenting the chalice high enough so that they are forced to keep their head up in the first place, and present the chalice already tilted enough to make bending the head unnecessary. Beyond that, you simply have to keep control and should not be shy about doing so. Head benders tend also to be the ones who take much more than just a tiny sip. They present a real danger of making you run short for the rest of the communicants, so firm control is necessary.
2. *The communicant is standing.* Such communicants ordinarily have a long term disability that prevents their kneeling, so most of them are experienced enough to know that you are going to have some trouble and will be alert to help you out, often by guiding the cup in the approved fashion. The best help you can give yourself is to move a little to the side and view the communicant from an oblique angle.
3. *The communicant has a bushy mustache.* The best you can do is to slow down and be alert to the communicant’s “body language”.
4. *The communicant is a small child.* Ask them to stand up.

Using the purificator

The celebrant will lay a purificator in front of each chalice. There is a cross worked into the cloth, and it will show on one side. This is the front of the purificator. You take this cloth up in your left hand. You use it to wipe the rim of the cup after each communicant has received the Precious Blood. The best way to hold the cloth for this purpose is to drape it over the left index finger, securing it

between the index finger and the middle finger on one side and allowing it to fall over the other side of the index finger. The cross in the cloth should be underneath, so stains are on the opposite side from the cross. The cloth can be arranged at first so that only a short end falls over the near side of your index finger, then as it is used it can be inched forward, perhaps each time you finish one pass along the communion rail. In this way, you will use the whole length of the cloth, not just one spot, and will keep the stains toward you and away from the view of the communicants.

The purificator will accumulate stains of the Precious Blood and of lipstick. You cannot avoid touching these stains, and should not be concerned about doing so. Do not think that you are risking sacrilege in touching a stain of the Precious Blood, so long as you don't do it both deliberately and gratuitously.⁵ When you replace the chalice on the corporal, fold the purificator back so that the stains are inside, and replace it, with the cross up, against the foot of the chalice.

Those at the communion rail who do not wish to communicate in the Precious Blood

Crossing the upper arms across one's breast is the standard sign that a person doesn't want to receive communion. Most of those who don't wish to take the Precious Blood know this and use it. The exceptions are small children and some visitors.

You may find some difficulty distinguishing between children who are too young to receive and who should therefore have their arms crossed in front of them, from those who really can and want to receive. The best guide, of course, is whether the child received the Body of Christ from the priest. But this requires you to try to keep an ear out for whether the priest is giving a blessing to someone further along the rail, and dividing your attention between that and the cup you are ministering is neither easy nor always advisable. You can quietly ask the accompanying parent if you are in doubt. The child himself, if he can and wishes to receive, is rarely bold enough to say anything on his own if you make to pass him by.

Visitors can only be dealt with by standing in front of them with the chalice and waiting for a sign that they either do or do not want to receive. Usually they will shake their heads and keep them bowed. Others will say "No, thank you." If all else fails, they just don't raise their heads and open their mouths. You can move on.

The Mass Ritual

At the communion

At the Parish Mass, the MC is the principal cup bearer, and he will ordinarily have communicated at the earlier Mass. The second cup bearer is usually the thurifer. Whoever is a cup bearer and has

⁵Mere stains do not carry the Real Presence. A sacrament is in essence a sign, and the sign of the Eucharist is natural, humanly nourishing food, specifically consumable bread and wine. A crumb of a consecrated host, however small, is consumable nourishment, however slight. But a stain cannot be consumed, is not nourishment, and so cannot be matter for the Eucharist, and therefore cannot have in it the Real Presence.

not earlier communicated will go up to kneel on the top step of the predilla as soon as the bell has been rung at the celebrant's own communion. From right to left, the order of those kneeling on the top step, their backs to the congregation, are the principal cup bearer (if he has not earlier communicated), the second cup bearer, the paten bearer. The torch bearers and the boat boy will kneel on the top step but with their backs to the sacristy.

The celebrant will administer the consecrated host to all servers. As soon as the celebrant has taken up the ciborium and left the center of the altar, the principal cup bearer goes to that place, genuflects in reverence for the sacrament, and takes up the chalice used by the celebrant, and a purificator. The principal cup bearer administers the precious Blood at least to the second cup bearer and to the paten bearer. Having done so, he goes down to administer the precious Blood to the congregation, beginning at the left side.

The second cup bearer rises when he has received the Precious Blood and goes to the center of the altar. He genuflects in reverence for the Blessed Sacrament and takes up the second chalice, together with a purificator. He administers the Precious Blood to any of the servers to whom the Blood has not yet been communicated. Then he goes down to the center of the first step of the predilla to begin administering the Precious Blood to the congregation.

If the principal cup bearer has not communicated at an earlier Mass, then the celebrant, after distributing the hosts to the servers, will administer the precious Blood to the principal cup bearer, and usually also to the second cup bearer and the paten bearer. The celebrant then reads the communion verse before going down to distribute communion to the congregation. As soon as the celebrant has left the altar, the principal cup bearer rises and goes to the center of the altar. If the celebrant communicated the second cup bearer in the Precious Blood, then both cup bearers rise and approach the altar together. They genuflect together, then the principal cup bearer first takes up the celebrant's chalice together with a purificator, then the second cup bearer takes up the other chalice and the other purificator. The principal cup bearer goes down to the left side to begin administering the Precious Blood to the congregation. The second cup bearer administers the cup to any of the servers who have not communicated in the Blood, and then goes down to the center of the first step to begin administering the Precious Blood to the congregation.

The principal cup bearer administers the Precious Blood beginning with the communicant farthest to the left along the communion rail. The second cup bearer begins in the middle of the bridge. The Precious Blood should not be offered to anyone who has not first received the host from the celebrant. Each communicant should remain kneeling until the cup has passed by him, whether or not he received the host, and whether or not he takes the Blood. However, visitors to St Mary's are often unaware of how we do things, and may rise from the rail before the cup has passed by. This is not a problem unless an eager communicant then immediately kneels in the vacated place. The cup bearer simply must keep an eye out for this.

When a cup bearer has come to the end of a line of communicants, he turns around and goes up to the first step of the predilla. He walks along this step back to his starting point. If he has to wait a moment to begin administering the cup, he should take the opportunity to adore silently the Precious Blood he is carrying.

It is usually best to allow at least one person between the communicant to whom the priest is administering the host and the one to whom you are offering the cup. So wait to start until the celebrant is just communicating the host to the third person along the rail. This allows each

communicant a moment to swallow or otherwise dispose the host before having to take the Precious Blood.

After the communion

When you have communicated the Precious Blood to the last communicant and wiped the rim of the cup for the last time, take the chalice up to the altar. If you are working with another cup bearer and he has not yet finished, wait on the first step of the predilla until he joins you. You mount the steps together, the MC to the right. The other cup bearer puts his chalice on the corporal first and replaces the purificator as specified above. Then the MC puts down his chalice and purificator. Both then genuflect to reverence the Precious Blood in the chalices, however little remains. If the celebrant is still at the altar, all of you will genuflect together. If the celebrant is busy at the tabernacle, or going to or from it, the cup bearers genuflect without him.

From this point, the cup bearers revert to their respective rôles (as, for example, MC and thurifer), directions for which are given separately. However, a cup bearer, whatever his other function, is in any case the preferred person to carry the sacred vessels from the altar to the sacristy (excepting the communion paten, which may be carried by its handle by anyone). At the time of this writing, it is expected that in the not distant future the handling of sacred vessels will be limited to instituted acolytes. At St Mary's we are anticipating that requirement by having only designated cup bearers handle the chalices and ciboria.

Other matters

In the event of a spill

Pray that this will never happen. With due care, it is very rare, and most ministers never experience it.

Prevention is of course of the first importance. The most important preventative measures are these:

1. Grip the chalice securely and watch that you keep it upright except when you are actually communicating the Precious Blood.
2. Watch your step and the chalice. Look where each foot is going when you are on a step or near a rug edge. Never take even one step backward without looking.
3. Keep the chalice well away from other things, such as the ambo and people.
4. Take care that your vestments don't catch on anything, and move deliberately enough so that if they do you can have a reasonable chance of recovering before you lose control.
5. Don't move so quickly that the Precious Blood rolls around in the cup.
6. When a communicant takes hold of the chalice, make sure you maintain firm and steady possession and control. Don't do anything to suggest to the communicant that you will allow anything else.

If, despite all best efforts, there is a spill, then you must blot it up immediately with the purificator. If a few drops fall on the communion rail, wiping them up is very easy. If some gets on

the floor, be exceedingly careful in stooping down with the chalice in your hand. If you have even the slightest apprehension that you cannot do this safely, then simply take the chalice up to the altar and deposit it on the corporal, go back to blot up the spill, then go up to get the chalice again.

In all events, fix carefully in your memory exactly where the spill occurred. If it is on the floor and there is any chance that the priest might step on it, draw the spot to his attention. It may be best to ask one of the other servers to fetch the finger towel and drop that on the spot until it is later dealt with. Of course you must yourself sedulously avoid that spot. When communion is finished, the priest may want to spread a purificator or other cloth over the spot until it can be washed with water. This is particularly advisable if the spill is on carpet.

After Mass, the spot where the spill occurred should be rinsed clean with plain water, even if it appears that all of the Precious Blood was successfully blotted up.

The former practice of kissing the spot where the Precious Blood spilled (or a host was dropped) is now discouraged.

If you are asked to help consume what remains of the Precious Blood

Visiting celebrants at St Mary's, because of inexperience, will often greatly overestimate the amount of wine needed to provide for communion. The MC should try to warn the celebrant, but sometimes this either is not done, or the MC is ignored, or too much is poured out anyway. If too much wine is poured out in the first place, the applicable rules (despite what is seen in other churches) require that what is left over of the Precious Blood be consumed by the celebrant. It is forbidden to reserve the Precious Blood for later use (as may be done with an excess of consecrated hosts). If the celebrant (or the MC) has erred badly in his estimate of what will be needed, there may be more of the Precious Blood left over than it is advisable for one person to consume at one time.

In such event, the celebrant will ask one or both of the cup bearers to help him finish off the Precious Blood. If you are asked to do this, you should act reverently, but there is no special rubric to observe. You need not genuflect to reverence the Sacrament, or sign yourself, or anything else of the sort. The fact that you have previously received communion, even at another Mass, doesn't matter. Whatever impediment there may be to your taking the Precious Blood in this way, you may and must assume it is overcome by the celebrant's direction to you. This does not mean, however, that you should attempt to consume the Precious Blood if some physical impairment makes it inadvisable. If, for example, you are not feeling entirely well and think the Precious Blood (which retains all the accidents of alcoholic wine) may make you sick to your stomach, you should certainly say so to the celebrant and decline to drink. And if you judge that what must be drunk off is more than you ought to drink, then say so to the celebrant and suggest one of the other servers to help out.

You should hold a purificator under your chin to catch any dribbles that may escape. And of course you should drink slowly enough to assure that you won't choke or anything else of that sort. Not all the contents of the chalice must be taken and swallowed all at once. You should use the purificator to blot any of the Precious Blood from your lips. Although you are in public view, all of this should be done as discreetly and reverently as possible under the circumstances.