

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

Arlington, Texas

Directions for
paten 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

There are two patens used at the Mass. One is the priest's paten which he uses at the altar. The other is the communion paten. The latter is the one in the charge of the paten bearer.

The function of the paten bearer is to catch the very small crumbs, most of them nearly invisible, that always and inevitably flake off the consecrated hosts as they are distributed. Therefore, the paten bearer, besides being ready to catch a complete host in the event of its accidentally slipping from the hand of the minister or from the tongue of the communicant, must at all times hold and carry the paten so that the tiny stray particles are also caught and retained on it. He must assume, from the moment the distribution of communion begins until the paten is cleaned after Mass, that very small but nevertheless divine fragments of our Lord's Body are on the paten and therefore in his safekeeping.

It is thus vitally important that the paten always, at all times, without any exception whatsoever, be held, carried, and rested horizontally flat. It must not be tipped in any direction, and of course it must not be waved about. When walking with it, the left hand may be held in front of the paten to keep air currents from carrying small host fragments off the paten.

The communion paten has two parts. One is the paten proper, the gilt plate, and the other is the wooden handle by which it is carried. The plate part is a sacred vessel, and the laws of the Church absolutely prohibit its being touched, under pain of mortal sin, by anyone but an ordained man or solemnly instituted acolyte. Moreover, it is not only irreverent, but a sacrilege to handle a sacred vessel such as the communion paten unnecessarily or negligently.

At the communion

After receiving communion himself, the paten bearer rises and steps forward to the altar. He takes up the communion paten, grasping the black wooden handle in his right hand. He must use the right hand, even if he is left-handed. He places his palm flat on his breastbone. The paten bearer goes down to the communion rail and takes up his position to the right of the celebrant. He faces squarely toward the right shoulder of the celebrant. The paten bearer reaches out with the paten, staying as far back from the celebrant as possible to avoid crowding him, while still being able to reach without bending over unduly. He should stand as close to the communion rail as he can without touching any of the communicants, some of whom always lean forward and extend their folded hands somewhat beyond the rail.

The paten is moved so that it is always under the host as the celebrant takes it from the ciborium and places it on the tongue of the communicant. The paten is held in the space between the ciborium and the communicant's mouth, just below chin level. The paten bearer must be careful that he touches nothing with the paten, neither the ciborium, the communicant, the celebrant, nor his own vestments.

The instant the host is safely deposited on a communicant's tongue, the paten bearer steps backward to allow the celebrant to administer the Sacrament to the next person.

Should a communicant elect to receive the host in the hand, the paten should not be extended, as there is almost no danger that the host will be dropped, and the celebrant will hold the ciborium close enough that any stray particles will be caught by the communicant's hand. If a person at the rail does not communicate but only receives a blessing, of course the paten should not be extended. In either

of these cases when the paten is not needed, the paten bearer does not pause while the host is communicated in the hand or the blessing is given, but instead immediately steps back to be ready for the celebrant when he ministers to the next communicant.

After the communion

When the celebrant has administered the Sacrament to the last communicant, the paten bearer turns and goes up to the altar with him. He does not cross over to be again at the right hand of the celebrant, but now is on his left hand and keeps there as they go up the steps. At the altar, the celebrant will either point to where he wishes the paten bearer to place the paten, or will take it directly from him. As soon as he has relinquished the paten, the bearer goes to kneel in his proper place on the first step of the predilla.