
WEEKDAY COMMUNION SERVICES IN THE PARISH

OFFICE OF WORSHIP.....DIOCESE OF ERIE

When a priest is unavailable to celebrate Mass at the parish on weekdays, often, a communion service is held. In these circumstances, it appears that services of various forms are being used in parishes around the diocese. This article gives guidelines on **the appropriate rite to use for communion services**. The increased use of communion services in the diocese raises broader issues which will be discussed in future Worship WorkBook articles.

PART I - Using the Right Rite

APPENDIX 1 Introduction to a Communion Service

APPENDIX 2: Communion Service Led by a Deacon

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PART II—A Pastoral and Theological View of Communion Services

PART III—Resources for Communion Services and Alternative Communal Prayer Forms

PART I — USING THE RIGHT RITE —

A. COMMUNION SERVICE OUTLINE

- A. Introductory Rites
 - Greeting
 - Penitential Rite
- B. Celebration of the Word of God
 - [Reflection by deacon, or sharing on Scripture -optional]
- C. Holy Communion
- D. Concluding Prayer
- E. Concluding Rite

(from *Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass*)

1. Structural Similarities and Differences between the Mass

Despite similarities, the Communion service has a different structure than the Mass. Clearly the Eucharistic Prayer with the actions of remembering, thanking, invoking the Holy Spirit etc. is missing. There are other more subtle differences however. For instance, there is no Opening Prayer in the rite for a Communion Service as there is at Mass. Nor is there a Prayer After Communion. Rather, there is a Concluding Prayer. The rite offers a variety of these. They give thanks for the gift of the eucharist, and express our hope that it may strengthen us in living our daily lives. They differ in character from the prayers in the Mass of the day.

Similarities do exist. The Penitential Rite has three possible forms and, as in the Mass, the threefold invocations of “Form C” may be modified to reflect the liturgical season. The Liturgy of the Word retains a full complement of Scripture. When the service is held in place of a daily Mass, a complete service of the Word may be celebrated with the texts for the readings taken from the Mass of the Day.

2. Using the Right Rite

The official ritual designated for a communion service is the “Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass With the Celebration of the Word,” found in *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (HCWEOM).¹ **Use of the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* is not appropriate.**

The Rite of Distributing Holy Communion..., chapter one of HCWEOM, is written in two parts. (*Caution, the ritual book combines part one and two.*) Both parts include texts for a presider who is either a priest, a deacon or a layperson. Our focus is on “Part One”, which is used when an assembly is gathered. Its purpose is “that the people should be nourished by the Word of God” #26. “Part Two,” a short version of the rite, is “used when the longer, more elaborate form is unsuitable, especially when there are only one or two for communion and a true community celebration is impossible.”² Such might be the case when a person seeks communion at a time outside the Mass schedule. It is similar to the rite used when in the setting of a hospital or sick room.

The rite offers a variety of prayer options for the “Greeting,” the “Penitential Rite,” the “Concluding Prayer,” and the “Blessing.” For the lay presider, the rite often gives a specific option that differs from those for the deacon, e.g., at the greeting and at the blessing. Clearly, lay presiders should be aware of this.

3. Notes on the rite

The rite may incorporate an opportunity for reflections and faith-sharing following the scripture readings.

Music is considered normal at liturgical gatherings, when possible, according to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy and can add depth and support to the prayer of those gathered.

B. BEFORE HOLDING A COMMUNION SERVICE

1. Prepare the service well.

Communion services should receive the same careful preparation that is expected for the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The layperson or deacon presider for the communion service should be notified well in advance and be thoroughly prepared to lead the service. Immediate preparation includes placing a corporal on the altar, lighting the candles, etc. Deacons vest in an alb and stole. A layperson may vest in an alb.

¹ (The Catholic Book Publishers ritual book edition is available at Hoffman’s Church and Religious Goods, 814-455-8094, www.HoffmannsErie.com).

² [...*Holy Communion ...Outside Mass* # 42. The Rites of the Catholic Church, Pueblo Publishing, 1976. This paragraph is not included in the Catholic Book publication.]

2. Distinguish between Mass and a communion service.

Before the service begins, a brief statement by the presider on the nature of the gathering is helpful. (See section C. Appendix One) The rite reminds us that, “Sacramental communion received during Mass is the more perfect participation in the eucharistic celebration” (#13). Those gathered are “sharers in the sacred banquet” through an extension of the presence, prayer and care of Christ and the community that was established at the Eucharistic celebration where the bread and wine were “taken, blessed, broken/poured and shared.”

3. Provide ongoing formation for presiders.

The presider must be well prepared to lead an assembly in communal prayer. While deacons may have opportunities to receive formal training in leading assemblies at prayer, most lay people do not. Pastors should encourage lay ministers to attend seminars and classes on presiding at communion and prayer services as available.

Seminars on skills for leading prayer and styles of presiding must be a part of a continuing education program for those who lead communion services. Several resources are available for deacons and lay ministers on developing an appropriate leadership style for prayer that is applicable to communion services. (See Part III).

4. Provide ongoing formation for the assembly.

Assist those who gather for daily Mass to grow in their understanding and appreciation of the Liturgy of the Eucharist and the differences between Mass and a Communion Service. It may be appropriate to do some catechesis during homilies at daily Mass.

C. APPENDIX ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO A COMMUNION SERVICE

Before the Communion Service, the minister (layperson or deacon) should make an introduction with the following as content:

GOOD MORNING (AFTERNOON) (EVENING)

I AM _____ (name) _____, A SPECIAL MINISTER OF THE EUCHARIST (OR A DEACON), AND I WILL BE CONDUCTING A COMMUNION SERVICE TODAY.

SINCE THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH, THE EUCHARISTIC BREAD HAS BEEN RESERVED IN ORDER THAT THE FAITHFUL WHO ARE SICK AND THOSE WHO WERE UNABLE TO BE PRESENT FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST MIGHT BE ABLE TO SHARE IN THE FRUIT OF THE EUCHARISTIC MEAL.

SINCE VATICAN COUNCIL II, WE HAVE BEEN GIVEN A RITE FOR “COMMUNION OUTSIDE MASS” WHICH DOES NOT SPECIFY “SICKNESS” OR “INABILITY TO ATTEND MASS,” BUT INCLUDES THE NEEDS OF THE FAITHFUL WHEN THERE IS NOT, OR CANNOT BE, A CELEBRATION OF MASS. TODAY IS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF SUCH AN OCCASION, SINCE _____ (reason for service) _____.

THE HOSTS THAT WE WILL USE WERE CONSECRATED AT MASS. IN THIS COMMUNION SERVICE WE WILL LISTEN TO THE WORD OF GOD, AND SHARE THIS EUCHARISTIC BREAD AS FOOD FOR OUR FAITH JOURNEY. WE PARTAKE OF THE BREAD OF LIFE, SO THAT AS GOD’S HOLY PEOPLE WE MIGHT BECOME MORE AND MORE THE BODY OF CHRIST IN OUR TIME AND PLACE.

(The Communion Service begins)

D. APPENDIX TWO:

**SAMPLE RITE FOR DISTRIBUTING HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE MASS
— LED BY A DEACON**

A. GREETING

[several alternative greetings are available]

Presider: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
and the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with you all.

People: And also with you.

B. PENITENTIAL RITE

[several options are offered for the penitential rite]

Presider: My brothers and sisters,
to prepare ourselves for this celebration,
let us call to mind our sins.

You brought us to salvation by your paschal mystery:
Lord, have mercy.

People Lord, have mercy.

Presider: You renew us by the wonders of your passion:
Christ have mercy.

People: Christ have mercy

Presider: You give us your body to make us one with your Easter sacrifice:
Lord have mercy.

People: Lord have mercy.

Presider: May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

People: Amen.

C. LITURGY OF THE WORD

—The readings for the Mass of the Day may be taken from the Lectionary.

First Reading (*may be read by a lector or other member of the assembly*)

Psalm – sung or spoken (*A seasonal psalm may be sung in place of the psalm of the day*)

Gospel Acclamation (*This acclamation should be sung if at all possible*)

Gospel Reading (*read by the deacon*)

Homily (*given by the deacon*)

General Intercessions

Presider: (*The presider introduces the intercessions by addressing the people*)

For example: “We bring our needs and requests before our God:”

Reader: (*The intentions are directed to the people.*)

For example: “For peace in our troubled world, ... (pause).... we pray to the Lord”
(*A brief pause to pray silently is appropriate.*)

Assembly: (*The people in turn pray the prayer together to God*)

For example: “Lord Hear Our Prayer”

Presider: (*The presider closes the intercessions with a prayer addressed to God*)

For example: Lord God of all creation,
You have given us every good thing.
We trust in your constant care for us.
Hear these petitions we bring before you.
We ask this through your son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with
you forever and ever.

Assembly: Amen.

D. HOLY COMMUNION

After the prayer, the presider goes to the place where the sacrament is reserved, takes the plate or bowl containing the body of the Lord, places it on the altar and genuflects. The presider then introduces the Lord's Prayer.

1. LORD'S PRAYER

Presider: Let us pray with confidence to the Father
 in the words our savior gave us:

Assembly: Our Father who art in heaven ...

2. SIGN OF PEACE

Presider: Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

(All make an appropriate sign of peace.)

3. DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

(The presider genuflects, takes the host, raises it slightly over the vessel and facing the people says:)

Presider: This is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world.
Happy are those who are called to his supper.

Assembly: Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.

(The presider says the following quietly and consumes the body of Christ:)

Presider: *May the body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.*

(The presider then distributes communion to the assembly saying: The Body of Christ. All respond: Amen)

(Afterward, a period of silence may be observed or a psalm or song of praise may be sung by all.)

E. CONCLUDING PRAYER

[many alternate prayers are available]

Presider: Lord,
we thank you for the nourishment you give us
through your holy gift.
Pour out your Spirit upon us.
and in the strength of this food from heaven
keep us single-minded in your service.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Assembly: Amen.

F. CONCLUDING RITE

[an alternate invocation is available]

Presider : The Lord be with you.

Assembly: And also with you

Presider: May almighty God bless you,
The Father, + and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Assembly: Amen

E. APPENDIX THREE:

SAMPLE RITUAL FOR DISTRIBUTING HOLY COMMUNION OUTSIDE MASS —LED BY A LAYPERSON

A. GREETING

Presider: Brothers and sisters,
the Lord invites us to his table
to share in the body of Christ:
bless him for his goodness.

People: Blessed be God forever .

B. PENITENTIAL RITE

[several options are offered for the penitential rite]

Presider: My brothers and sisters,
to prepare ourselves for this celebration,
let us call to mind our sins.

You brought us to salvation by your paschal mystery:
Lord, have mercy.

People Lord, have mercy.

Presider: You renew us by the wonders of your passion:
Christ have mercy.

People: Christ have mercy

Presider: You give us your body to make us one with your Easter sacrifice:
Lord have mercy.

People: Lord have mercy.

Presider: May almighty God have mercy on us,
forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.

People: Amen.

C. LITURGY OF THE WORD

—The readings for the Mass of the Day may be taken from the Lectionary.

First Reading

Psalm – sung or spoken *(A seasonal psalm may be sung in place of the psalm of the day)*

Gospel Acclamation *(This acclamation should be sung if at all possible)*

Gospel Reading

Sharing/Reflection *(A period of reflection and/or a sharing of faith may be offered among those gathered)*

General Intercessions

Presider: *(The presider introduces the intercessions by addressing the people)*

For example: “We bring our needs and requests before our God:”

Reader: *(The intentions are directed to the people.)*

For example: “For peace in our troubled world, ...(pause) we pray to the Lord”
(A brief pause to pray silently is appropriate)

Assembly: *(The people in turn pray the prayer together to God)*

For example: “Lord Hear Our Prayer”

Presider: *(The presider closes the intercessions with a prayer addressed to God)*

For example: Lord God of all creation,
You have given us every good thing.
We trust in your constant care for us.
Hear these petitions we bring before you.
We ask this through your son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with
you forever and ever.

Assembly: Amen.

D. HOLY COMMUNION

After the prayer, the presider goes to the place where the sacrament is reserved, takes the plate or bowl containing the body of the Lord, places it on the altar and genuflects. The presider then introduces the Lord’s Prayer.

1. LORD’S PRAYER

Presider: Let us pray with confidence to the Father
in the words our savior gave us:

Assembly: Our Father who art in heaven ...

2. SIGN OF PEACE

Presider: Let us offer each other a sign of peace.

(All make an appropriate sign of peace.)

3. DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION

(The presider genuflects, takes the host, raises it slightly over the vessel and facing the people says:)

Presider: This is the Lamb of God
who takes away the sins of the world.
Happy art those who are called to his supper.

Assembly: Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
but only say the word and I shall be healed.

(The presider says the following quietly and consumes the body of Christ:)

Presider: May the body of Christ bring me to everlasting life.

(The presider then distributes communion to the assembly saying: The Body of Christ. All respond: Amen)

(Afterward, a period of silence may be observed or a psalm or song of praise may be sung by all.)

E. CONCLUDING PRAYER

[many alternate prayers are available]

Presider: Lord,
we thank you for the nourishment you give us
through your holy gift.
Pour out your Spirit upon us.
and in the strength of this food from heaven
keep us single-minded in your service.
We ask this in the name of Jesus the Lord.

Assembly: Amen.

F. CONCLUDING RITE

[an alternate invocation is available]

Presider : May the Lord bless us, + *(the presider signs herself / himself)*
protect us from all evil
and bring us to everlasting life.

Assembly: Amen

WEEKDAY COMMUNION SERVICES IN THE PARISH OFFICE OF WORSHIP.....DIOCESE OF ERIE

PART II- REFLECTIONS ON THE THEOLOGY OF COMMUNION SERVICE

This paper affirms the importance and value of receiving communion outside Mass while clarifying 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 or to those who wish to be strengthened by the devotional practice of daily reception of holy communion.
 - It provides background for further reflection on and the evaluation of communion services.
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1. Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass.

The ritual book *Holy Communion & 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 the 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 reflects 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, the 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 word: 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 Eucharistic 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 aspects of 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 absence of a priest. Nonetheless, the distinctions he describes are real and helpful for a deeper understanding of the relationship of Eucharist to other prayer forms.

B. DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN EUCHARISTIC LITURGY AND COMMUNION SERVICES

1. Eucharistic Liturgy is 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 learn to offer themselves." These actions of the eucharist 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 reminder 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 have 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 for 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 means 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 Directory 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 a 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. It also allows those who desire to receive communion in a partial assembly during the week to do so. In both cases, the church's Eucharistic action is continued in another place and time.

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" as 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 at least one of the parishes. Needless to say, advanced 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 and 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-for 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.

4. The Future

As the number of priests decreases, the frequency of communion services will most likely increase. More and more assemblies could experience communion services. Since these experiences will influence their understanding of Eucharist, it is critical that a firm foundation is set down that will support the development of the future.

WEEKDAY COMMUNION SERVICES IN THE PARISH

OFFICE OF WORSHIP DIOCESE OF ERIE

PART III – RESOURCES

A. THE RITE

"Rite of Distributing Holy Communion Outside Mass With the Celebration of the Word," In *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York 1976.

"Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass," In *The Rites of the Catholic Church*, Pueblo Publishing Co., New York, 1976. **"Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum,"** Catholic Book Publishing Co., New York, 1983

B. ARTICLES

"Communion Services: A Break With Tradition?" Gerard Austin. In *Fountain of Life* ed. Gerard Austin, Pastoral Press, 1991, p.199

Although his article focuses on Sunday communion services, Austin examines differences between a communion service and the liturgy of the eucharist from four perspectives, including that of scholastic theology. He expresses reservations for the future of the church if this path is followed

"Mass and Communion Service: What's the Difference?" Thomas Richstattter, O.F.M. *Catholic Update*, September, 1999 #C 0999. St. Anthony Messenger Press. For copies call: 1-800-488-0488. 10-99 @ .35 ea.. 100-199 @ .25 ea. etc.

Great for the assembly. Valuable for both a deeper understanding of Mass and a clearer understanding of the nature of a Communion Service. Examines the parts of Mass to demonstrate how the two are different. Frames the discussion in a perspective of "how times change." Reflects on "core truths" that do not change and the need to remain open to the Holy Spirit on other issues.

"Ministers of Eucharist," Peter Fink, S.J. in *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, p. 422--425. Peter Fink, S.J. ed. The Liturgical Press, 1990.

Fink addresses the theological connections between the Sunday Eucharist and the communion service in the section labeled: "Ministers of Eucharist Beyond the Assembly" p. 424. He considers communion services as an extension of presence, of prayer and of care" and points out that communion services do not stand on their own, and do not substitute for the eucharistic act of the church.

C. LEADING PRAYER

Lay Presiding: The Art of Leading Prayer, Kathleen Hughes, R.S.C.J.; The Liturgical Press. \$4.00

Leading the Community in Prayer, (Video, John Brooks-Leonard, The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. \$39.95. (In St. Mark's Center Video Library.) A primer for laypeople, deacons or priests new to leading communal prayer and a review for priests and others wishing to improve their presiding skills. Begins with assumption that the art of presiding is built upon a genuine reverence and hospitality. Part I addresses non-verbal elements, e.g., silence, gestures, eye contact etc. Part II addresses verbal elements, e.g., liturgical language, units of communal prayer, collects, blessings etc. Well done.

Training for the Parish Lector. (Video) The Liturgical Press
The presider needs all the skills of a fine lector. Use this or any other lector training materials to review or learn about volume, pace, diction, rhythm, etc

D. EUCHARIST AND SUNDAY

A Video Guide for Gather Faithfully Together

A video demonstrating Cardinal Mahony's vision as set forth in his pastoral letter.

***Gather Faithfully Together*, Cardinal Roger Mahoney.** Liturgy Training Publication, 1997. 64 pp.

"A letter about the vigor of the Sunday assembly and ways to make the liturgy more meaningful."

***Guide for the Assembly*, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin.** Liturgy Training Publication, 1997, 58pp.

"A discussion of Sunday liturgy in parishes as the center, the spirit and the force of Catholic life."

***Guide to Keeping Sunday Holy: Apostolic Letter, Dies Domini*- Pope John Paul II.** 73pp. Liturgy Training Publication.

"This apostolic letter, on the meaning of Sunday and the reasons for living Sunday, encourages us to deepen our understanding of this rich and holy day."

Living Christ's Presence - Distributed during the Eucharist 2000 year. (A clear and thorough examination of the many faceted understandings of the Eucharistic Liturgy. Created by the Diocese of Detroit.)

***Neither Strangers Nor Spectators*-Diocese of Erie**

"A guide for worship in the diocese of Erie similar in nature to Mahony document used to prepare for the year of Jubilee."

E. PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK

Handbook for Ministers of Care, Genevieve, Glen, OSB, Marilyn Kofler, SP Kevin O'Connor; Liturgy Training Publications, 1997.

F. CONTACT INFORMATION

- The Liturgical Press 1-800-858-5450
- Liturgy Training Publications 1-800-933-1800
- Pastoral Press 1- 800-548-8749