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From the Bishop

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Purification of the vessels used during Mass

New procedures for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion

On Sunday, Dec. 17, 2006, new procedures take effect in our diocese for extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion when they assist at Mass.

The sacred vessels that are used during the Mass (i.e., the vessels that hold the Hosts or the Precious Blood) will now be purified by the priest or the deacon, instead of by the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion.

The Holy Father has asked that we follow this new policy regarding the purification of the sacred vessels used during Mass. In October, Cardinal Francis Arinze, prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, communicated the Holy Father's new directive to the U.S. bishops.

In November, I wrote to our priests and deacons informing them of the new procedures.

The new policy regarding purification of the sacred vessels by only the priest or deacon brings into focus the role of the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion during Mass.

The primary role of the extraordinary ministers is to assist the priest and deacon with the distribution of Holy Communion. The distribution of Holy Communion is a beautiful ministry that the extraordinary ministers undertake in service to their brothers and sisters at Mass.

The purification of the vessels that takes place after the distribution of Holy Communion is a separate action, which is the personal responsibility of the priest or the deacon.

What is the new procedure which extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion should follow when they assist at Mass? Here are four simple steps:

1. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion may enter into the sanctuary only after the priest has received both species.
2. After the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion receive Holy Communion, they then receive from the hands of the priest or the deacon the vessel containing the Eucharist.
3. At the end of Holy Communion, all of the sacred vessels are brought back to the altar. At the altar, the extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion who assisted with the distribution of the Precious Blood consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their own chalice of distribution.

4. The extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion then return to their places in the congregation. The priest or the deacon purifies the vessels.

If a deacon is not serving at the Mass, the priest purifies the vessels at the altar immediately after Holy Communion, or he may carry the vessels that need to be purified over to the credence table and purify them there immediately after Holy Communion.

The priest may also leave the sacred vessels that need to be purified, suitably covered and on a corporal at the credence table, and purify them there immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.

If a deacon is serving at the Mass, he carries the vessels that need to be purified over to the credence table and purifies them there immediately after Holy Communion.

The deacon may also leave the sacred vessels that need to be purified, suitably covered and on a corporal at the credence table, and purify them there immediately after Mass following the dismissal of the people.

After the vessels have been purified by the priest or deacon, other ministers may further wash the vessels before they are used for the next Mass.

The Catholic Church devotes a lot of attention to the celebration of the Mass because the Eucharistic Sacrifice is the source and summit of the Christian life. All of the good works and ministries of the parish flow from our worship.

The worship that we render to God through the saving sacrifice of His Son, is the most important activity of the parish. As we implement these new guidelines in our diocese, may Our Lord help all of us to participate fully, consciously, and actively in the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries.