



Policy Regarding Purification of Vessels at Mass

- **purification** an action that is performed by the priest or deacon: it is the pouring of water into the sacred vessels to cleanse them of loose particles of the Body of Christ and remove any remaining Precious Blood. After the liquid is consumed, a purificator is used to dry the sacred vessels. These vessels may then be washed after the Mass.
- **instituted acolyte** a level of ordained ministry called a “minor order” . This should not be confused with a person who has the role of *server* at Mass. In the dioceses of the United States of America, the ministry of instituted acolyte, open only to men, is primarily done by those preparing to receive Holy Orders. An instituted acolyte may assist at the altar (as a server does) and also distribute Communion when necessary. An instituted acolyte may assist in purification of the vessels at/after Mass.
- **wash** an action which presumes the housekeeping task of cleansing a vessel, usually prior to storage or subsequent re-use. Anyone may participate in this service, presuming that they accomplish this with simple reverence.

The Roman Missal, 3rd ed. (GIRM references) states:

(278) Whenever a fragment of the host adheres to his fingers, especially after the fraction or after the Communion of the faithful, the Priest should wipe his fingers over the paten or, if necessary, wash them. Likewise, he should also gather any fragments that may have fallen outside the paten.

(279) The sacred vessels (note: this refers to patens, chalice, and Communion cups) are purified by the Priest, the Deacon, or an instituted acolyte after Communion or after Mass, insofar as possible at the credence table (emphasis added for clarity). The purification of the chalice is done with water alone or with wine and water, which is then consumed by whomever does the purification. The paten is (patens are) wiped clean as usual with the purificator. Care is to be taken that whatever may remain of the Blood of Christ after the distribution of Communion is consumed immediately and completely at the altar (this presumes the *chalice* that has possibly remained on the altar, with the Communion cups being returned to the credence table).

The Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy of the USCCB developed the following responses; they are taken from the document, *Seven Questions on the Distribution of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds*. The complete document is located at <http://usccb.org/>.

When Holy Communion is distributed under both kinds, what happens to what remains of the Precious Blood? “When more of the precious Blood remains than was necessary for Communion, and if not consumed by the bishop or priest celebrant, the deacon immediately and reverently consumes at

the altar all of the Blood of Christ which remains; he may be assisted, if needs dictate, by other deacons and priests. When there are extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion (note: this means that there is one priest and perhaps a deacon, at most, therefore Extraordinary ministers are clearly needed), they may consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice of distribution (note: this indicates the Communion cup) with the permission of the diocesan bishop.

Who then purifies the sacred vessels? As ordinary ministers of Holy Communion, the priest and the deacon purify the sacred vessels. The instituted acolyte, by reason of his office, “helps the priest or deacon to purify and arrange the sacred vessels.” (GIRM, n. 192)

May the extraordinary minister of Holy Communion assist in the purification of sacred vessels? In accord with the Holy Father’s decision (2006), as reported in Francis Cardinal Arinze’s letter of 10/12/06, an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion **may not** assist in the *purification* (emphasis added by author) of sacred vessels. The ministry of the Extraordinary Minister of Communion may be required for those instances where there are not enough *ordinary ministers* to distribute Holy Communion, due to the consummate importance of ensuring that the faithful have the opportunity to receive Holy Communion at Mass, even when it is distributed under both species.

What about those instances where there are many chalices and only one priest to purify them? When there are insufficient priests, deacons, or instituted acolytes to purify the additional chalices during Mass, the purification may take place immediately after the Mass has concluded. In the U.S. (at the time of this writing 2012), it is up to the diocesan bishop if the extraordinary ministers may consume what remains of the Precious Blood. The Diocese of Dallas (and many dioceses in the U.S.) allows the extraordinary ministers to consume what remains of the Precious Blood from their chalice (note: this means the chalice which the minister has served, and that chalice only. It is advisable to remind Extraordinary ministers that this consuming should be done at the credence table immediately upon returning the vessel OR in the sacristy following Mass. Consuming the extra Precious Blood at the credence table is the best choice, so that the Precious Blood is not carried any additional distance, risking spillage. This action presumes reverence at all times. If an extraordinary minister is unable, for any reason, to consume the remaining Precious Blood, it falls upon the ordinary minister(s) to accomplish this.) The Precious Blood should never be poured into the sacrarium.

Pastoral Note: It seems reasonable that (at least some of) the Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion “complete” their ministry by helping to wash the sacred vessels, after Mass is concluded. This is a simple task, and can often provide a quiet time to reflect on the service that this ministry provides to our brothers and sisters. Many parishes lack a sacristan, and this task can easily be accomplished by a few faithful extraordinary ministers after each Mass. It is offered as consideration.

Policy Note: Bishop Kevin J. Farrell asks that all those who are Ministers of Holy Communion (ordinary and extraordinary) be instructed in this diocesan Policy.
