

The impact of the 2002 *GIRM* on liturgical ministers

(Fifth of five articles)
By John G. Hibbard

In my last article, I examined how the 2002 *GIRM* affects the role of the priest. This article explores its impact on three other ministries: servers, lectors and extraordinary ministers of communion.

SERVERS

The 2002 *GIRM* uses the word “acolyte” to indicate those functions that are carried out by servers. It distinguishes between formally instituted acolytes, who are permanent ministers, and others who exercise the ministry of serving. Servers may fulfill the acolyte’s functions, except where the text calls for a “formally instituted acolyte.” The new edition also indicates that the function of altar servers is now regulated by norms established by the bishop for his diocese (no. 107).

If instituted acolytes are present with servers, they should carry out the more important functions while servers would fulfill the other functions (see 187). However, this paragraph does not determine the more important function, which is left for others to discern.

A change that will affect many parishes concerns the seating of the servers. In churches where chairs for deacon and subdeacon flank the presider’s chair, servers customarily have occupied these seats. The 2002 *General Instruction* makes it clear that servers do not sit with the presiding priest, but in a distinct place nearby so that the priest’s chair stands out as a symbol of his function of presiding over the assembly and directing prayer. The deacon’s chair should be placed near the celebrant’s. Chairs for the other ministers should be arranged so that they are clearly distinguished from the seats for the clergy, and the ministers can conveniently carry out their ministry at the chair and the altar (189, 310). During the eucharistic prayer servers remain at their places; they do not stand or kneel behind the altar or beside the priest. A server may assist with the sacramentary at the altar; in this case, the server, following the directions given to the deacon, stands back from the priest when not needed to turn the pages of the sacramentary. (See instructions for deacon at the altar, 179, 215.)

For years people have wondered what to do when passing from one side of the sanctuary to the other during the liturgy if the tabernacle is behind the

altar. Number 274 clarifies this. If the tabernacle is in the sanctuary, the priest, deacon and other ministers genuflect to it when they approach or leave the altar, but not during the celebration of Mass. Otherwise, all who cross before the Blessed Sacrament genuflect, unless they are involved in a procession. Ministers who carry the cross or candles bow their heads in place of a genuflection (274).

So not to delay the communion of the faithful, it makes sense to me that only the extraordinary ministers of communion receive communion at the altar. Servers, readers and other ministers should join in the communion procession.

READERS

The 2002 *GIRM* affirms that using several readers should be the norm for Sunday eucharist: "If there are several readings, it is better to distribute them among a number of readers" (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 52). *GIRM* 109 states that if several persons who can exercise the same ministry are present, nothing forbids their performing different parts of the same ministry. If there are several readings, it is better to distribute them among several readers. (However, the only *single* reading that may be divided among several readers is the Passion of the Lord.)

While there may be occasions when it is impossible to have several readers, the assembly's ability to listen to God's word is enhanced when it hears different voices. Because good proclamation needs so much preparation, it is sufficient for one reader to prepare one reading properly, looking at the meaning, the literary genre, the style of the writing, etc., practising aloud.

The biggest change is that the 2002 *GIRM* explicitly states that the lectionary is placed on the ambo ahead

of time and is not carried in the entrance procession (118, 120d, 172, 194). In one sense this is not new, since all along the *General Instruction* spoke of the *Book of the Gospels* being carried in the procession. (For more on this topic see "Pastoral Notes on the Use of the *Book of the Gospels*," *National Bulletin on Liturgy* 137, Summer 1994, pp. 115-125.)

Who should carry the *Book of the Gospels*? Naturally, if a deacon is present, he may carry the *Book of the Gospels*, but this is not mandatory: carrying the *Book of the Gospels* is not listed as a diaconal function in 171. In the absence of a deacon, the reader may carry it (194). Or, the *Book of the Gospels* may be placed on the altar before the celebration begins.

Here in Canada a *Book of the Gospels* is in preparation, but until it is printed, a parish might delay implementing this part of the *GIRM*, or decorate the cover of a second Lectionary so it can serve as a gospel book.

The 2002 *GIRM* defines the type of bow or reverence the readers and all ministers make to the altar. The reader makes a profound bow to the altar with the others. However, whoever carries the *Book of the Gospels* does not make a reverence when approaching the altar, but goes directly to the altar, where he or she places the *Book of the Gospels* and then takes a place [in the sanctuary] with the other ministers (195, 49, 122). The reader could bow to the altar after placing the *Book of the Gospels*, but this is not specified.

If the *Book of the Gospels* is used, the reader removes the Lectionary from the ambo after the second reading, and places it on a shelf under the ambo, on the side table or in another place of respect (*National Bulletin on Liturgy*, 137, Summer 1994, pp. 115-125, no. 42). Don't place the Lectionary on a shelf in front of the ambo where it

would compete with the *Book of the Gospels* carried in solemn procession to the ambo.

All the readings (including the gospel) are always proclaimed from the ambo (lectern). In addition to the readings, only the responsorial psalm, the general intercessions, the homily and the Easter Proclamation (*Exsultet*) are proclaimed from the ambo. The dignity of the ambo requires that only a minister of the word should go up to it (see 58, 309).

Readers approach the ambo after the opening prayer. (There should never be any movement while the priest and assembly are praying.) Moreover, the 2002 *GIRM* mentions nothing about bowing to the presider or altar. Naturally readers passing directly in front of the altar would bow, but this should not be the norm, since readers should sit close to the ambo. The situation may be different for cantors who sing the psalm; they may have to cross in front of the altar from the area for the music ministry.

The 2002 *GIRM* states that the responsorial psalm is sung from the ambo, since it part of God's word (309). "It is preferable that the responsorial psalm be sung, at least as far as the people's response is concerned. If the psalm cannot be sung, then it should be recited in such a way that it is particularly suited to fostering meditation on the word of God" (61).

The 2002 *GIRM* emphasizes the role of silence in the liturgy, especially after the readings and homily (nos. 56, 128, 45). Therefore, at the end of the reading, it would make sense for the reader to remain at the ambo for a moment of silence before the responsorial psalm. Leading this period of silence is part of the reader's ministry. The reader leaves as the psalmist approaches to sing the psalm or the music begins.

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF COMMUNION

Of all the ministers, extraordinary minister of communion are most affected by the 2002 *GIRM*. As in the case of servers, it makes a clearer distinction between a formally instituted acolyte, who is a permanent minister, and other ministers who serve the priest or distribute communion as extraordinary ministers. Formally instituted acolytes may assist the priest as extraordinary ministers in giving communion to the people. In the absence of a deacon, acolytes may administer the chalice (187, 191).

In general, the 2002 *GIRM* no longer permits extraordinary ministers of communion to assist the priest in breaking the bread or pouring the consecrated wine into other chalices (83), to consume the consecrated wine or bread after communion (163)—these are reserved to the priest and deacon, or to purify or cleanse the sacred vessels; this is reserved to a formally instituted acolyte, a deacon or the priest (279). (The recent instruction, *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, prohibits any manner of pouring the blood of Christ after the consecration.)

However, the American and Canadian Conferences of Bishops have sought or will seek indults (exceptions) to the *GIRM*. The Congregation for Divine Worship has granted indults to the United States that permit extraordinary ministers of communion to consume the precious blood and to purify the sacred vessels. Presumably these will also be granted for Canada. This question of indults is one of the reasons why parishes have been instructed not to implement the changes

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in the 2002 GIRM until its translation has been approved by the conference of bishops and received the *recognitio* of the Holy See. During this time, the conference of bishops can apply for indulgences, too.

Another change is the provision that the extraordinary ministers of communion do not come to the altar until the priest has received communion, and that they always accept from the priest the vessel containing either the consecrated bread or wine (86, 162). This legislation is intended to insure that extraordinary ministers of communion are not confused with concelebrants because they stand at or around the altar for the eucharistic prayer. Since their ministry is to assist the priest and deacon with the distribution of communion, they do not need to stand at the altar during the celebration. They come to the altar to receive communion before distributing it to the people, following the principle that one cannot give what one has not received.

This directive does not prohibit communion ministers from taking a place in the sanctuary for the celebration, or moving closer to the altar during the sign of peace. Thus they are ready to move to the altar to receive communion and will not delay the communion of the faithful. (The document presumes that

extraordinary ministers of communion are already seated nearby in the sanctuary.) Therefore, it would not be in keeping with the document or its spirit if they only left their seats in the congregation after the priest's communion. If they sit in the assembly, then during the breaking of bread, the extraordinary ministers of communion come to the sanctuary and stand ready. At this time they do not stand at the altar with the priest or deacon. As the communion hymn starts or as the priest receives communion from the chalice, they approach the altar in order to receive communion. After all have received communion (under both kinds), they receive the vessel of consecrated bread or wine from the priest or deacon and go to their pre-assigned stations to share communion with the faithful. When they have finished distributing communion, they return the vessels of consecrated bread or wine to the priest or deacon at the altar (163). If fragments of the consecrated bread adhere to their fingers, the ministers of the consecrated bread go to the side table to purify their fingers, and then return to their places (278). If consecrated wine remains, the extraordinary ministers of communion help the priest and deacon consume it. The sacred vessels are then purified,



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preferably at the credence (side) table or after the eucharist. The ministers then return to their places.

The silence of the 2002 *GIRM* about extraordinary ministers of communion going to the tabernacle to get the ciborium indicates that it presumes that all are receiving communion from hosts consecrated at Mass; there is no need for anyone to go to the tabernacle. It does state that the priest or deacon carries any remaining consecrated hosts to the tabernacle.

ASSUMPTIONS TO REMEMBER

Because the *General Instruction* must describe the liturgy for churches that differ vastly in resources and layout, it must make some assumptions. Two assumptions concern all those who minister at the eucharist:

- 1) All ministers are vested in an alb, and
- 2) All ministers have a place in the sanctuary, close to where they will minister.

The alb is the vestment common to all the baptized, as 336 points out. However, number 339 of the 2002 *GIRM* leaves the Conference of Bishops to decide whether all ministers must wear an alb; most episcopal conferences have not made a decision. Some bishops may have issued directives for their diocese; most places follow local custom. The purpose of the 2002 *GIRM* is not to change local custom, which may depend upon the second assumption, the place of the ministers during the celebration.

Ministers at the eucharist do not have to sit in the sanctuary or near the altar. (There is nothing wrong with them doing so, either.) Practically, ministers should be where they are needed: servers, near the credence table and the altar; readers, near the lectern; extra-ordinary ministers of communion, ready to come to the altar when needed. When ministers are too far away, getting from point A to B

creates delays and draws too much attention to the minister.

Some people say that lay ministers should sit among the people and not be vested. But this thinking suggests that lay people have no place in the sanctuary. Moreover, it sets up a visual division between the ordained priest and the congregation, and leads to the conclusion that the alb is the vestment of the ordained, rather than of the baptized. When the priest is the only vested person in the church and the only person in the sanctuary, it gives the impression that lay people belong in the nave. People begin to form a theology based on what they constantly see. The functional division between the sanctuary and the nave becomes a theological division.

Still, there is a danger of clericalizing the lay ministers at the eucharist or thinking that ministry is *the* way to participate in the eucharist. Pastors and liturgy committees might examine attitudes within their own parish. Is the priest the only person in the sanctuary? Are the various ministers regarded as the main participants in the liturgy?

When the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops approves and issues the 2002 *General Instruction*, its implementation will provide an excellent opportunity for educating and renewing our parishes about the mystery of the eucharist that we celebrate. Until that time, we can reflect on this mystery that is central to our lives and take time to study and re-visit documents that relate to it.

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