

Handbook for Eucharistic Visitors

Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee
2012



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FORWARD

Whether you are currently a Eucharistic Minister and wish to become a **Eucharistic Visitor** –or would like to become involved in this ministry or have responsibility in training these ministers, this Handbook for Eucharistic Visitors is a complement and an addition to the LEM training. Being a Eucharistic Visitor is a special ministry. We are entrusted to carry the Gifts of God to the People of God with the Love of God. The practical guidance and advice in this handbook will enable you to do this with the dignity and respect due this ministry.

This Handbook was prayerfully written, collected, and assembled by the Diocese of Tennessee Vocational Diaconal Candidates, 2012.¹ It reflects not only our training as deacons, educators, and professionals in our own fields, but also our years of dedicated lay ministry. It is our intent to offer a shared vision, common practices, and a theological understanding for the special ministries of Eucharistic Minister and Eucharistic Visitor.²

Respectfully submitted

Betty Carpenter

Charles Grimes

Bonnie Lloyd

Burns Rogers

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¹ While much of the material in this Handbook is new, we acknowledge with thanks the liberal use of materials from the Episcopal Diocese of Albany, NY, the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth, and the Diocese of San Joaquin.

² Materials reflect the Canons of 2007 regarding Lay Ministries

PREFACE

Lay ministers are called in the Book of Common Prayer to “take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church”.³ This handbook will assist congregations with the training and licensing of lay ministers who are called to serve through the worship of the Church.

This particular Handbook will be dedicated to the EUCHARISTIC VISITOR. The Canons stipulate that,

“A Eucharistic Visitor is a layperson authorized to take the Consecrated Elements in a timely manner following a Celebration of Holy Eucharist to members of the congregation who, by reason of illness or infirmity, were unable to be present at the celebration. A Eucharistic Visitor should normally act under the direction of a Deacon, if any, otherwise, the Member of the Clergy or other leader exercising oversight of the congregation or other community of faith. Prior to licensing, the individual expecting to receive this license must complete Eucharistic Visitor Training conducted by their rector/priest-in-charge”⁴ and complete the Diocese Sexual Misconduct Training.⁵

³ *Book of Common Prayer*, Catechism. p 855.

⁴ *Constitution and Canons of the Episcopal Church*, 2009. Title III, Canon 4, Sec. 7.

⁵ Diocese of Tennessee requirement

WEEK 1—Open with Prayer

*Look with mercy, O God our Father,
on all whose increasing years bring them weakness, distress, or isolation.
Provide for them homes of dignity and peace;
give them understanding helpers, and the willingness to accept help;
and, as their strength diminishes, increase their faith and their assurance of your love.
This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The Book of Common Prayer, p. 830

Being Called

The Church is called to minister to those most in need in our society. In doing so, we are following Jesus' own example as he forgave and welcomed into fellowship "the tax collectors and the harlots" – those marginalized and outcast in society. One of the most remarkable and enlightening passages in the Gospels concerns Jesus' teaching about ministering to the poor, the sick, and the needy states:

I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me... as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.

Matthew 25:35 – 36

The Nature of this Training

As a Eucharistic Visitor we have the opportunity for worship, prayer, and fellowship; and the privilege of bringing the Blessed Sacrament to those "who for reasonable cause cannot be present at a public celebration of the Eucharist"⁶ because they are ill, homebound, or in a hospital or nursing home.

We will have been nurtured and renewed through our own participation at the Eucharist, and will be sent forth by the Church with the Blessed Sacrament. God will use us as a "Christ-bearer" to connect those whom we visit with the larger corporate Body of Christ, not only in our church, but also in the whole Communion of Saints, past, present, and future.

The Eucharist Visit is, therefore, an expression of the Church, an occasion in which the Risen Lord Jesus is present among His people. Although the act of bringing the Consecrated Bread and Wine to a shut-in is not a Eucharist, it is a time of prayer and worship and of receiving Christ in the Sacrament. Whatever is done and said during that visit will be "Church" for that person: we have the privilege of being one of the links that keep that shut-in connected to the larger parish family. Each Eucharist Visit is an expression of the reality of the "Communion of the Saints."

⁶ BCP, p. 396

Differences between LEM and LEV

There are marked differences between these two ministries, thus there are two different training modules. An LEV is much more than simply bringing the Blessed Sacrament to the homebound. When we meet with a homebound parishioner, we often think that we are visiting *from* the Church – and of course the sick person being visited is very aware of being *away from* and not part of the parish for Sunday Eucharist. However, from a theological standpoint, it is more correct to say that when we, as a Eucharistic Visitor meet with a homebound parishioner, we *are* the Church. Jesus taught His disciples “when two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them.”⁷ As an LEV visiting the homebound—we are providing this Pastoral Care.

NOTE: This ministry does not replace clergy visits; it is simply another supportive ministry.

⁷ NSRV Bible, Matthew 18:19

WEEK TWO—Open with Prayer

Theology and Spirituality—Review

Serving at the altar as a LEM or Chalice Bearer was originally conceived of as purely liturgical ministry. As the church matured in its understanding of some of the theological implications of the Eucharist—namely, that it is a sacrament of not only *vertical* communion with God, but also *horizontal* communion between the members of the Body of Christ—the desirability of including those who, for reasons of health, are chronically unable to attend the liturgy became evident. Hence, the designation *Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Minister* was created to designate persons who are specially trained and licensed to deliver the sacrament to the chronically homebound directly following the celebration of the liturgy. Then, at the 2003 General Convention of The Episcopal Church, the canons on ministry were thoroughly revised. In the process, those formerly known as Lay Eucharistic Ministers (LEM) were named simply *Eucharistic Ministers*. Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Ministers (PLEM) were named *Eucharistic Visitors*. The Constitution and Canons of the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) have not designated new titles for these ministries and so the same or previous titles continue to be used. The Diocese of Tennessee employs the title *Eucharistic Minister* (LEM) to describe the ministry of *Eucharistic Ministers* who serve only at the Altar and which is equivalent to the older title, *Licensed Chalice Bearer*, as well as *Eucharistic Visitors* (LEV) who visit shut-ins.

Understanding Ourselves and Others⁸

As a person providing pastoral care, it is important to take time to examine our own attitudes and feelings about those with whom we are visiting. These persons may be ill, disabled, or facing death. Indeed, we are *all* growing older and closer to our own death.

At times, we may be reluctant to visit hospitals or nursing homes because of fears of confronting our own limitations and mortality. By being conscious of our own anxiety, we can offer it to God and find strength for the work we are given to do. Keep in mind that persons with disabilities are people with many of the same fears and anxieties. We all have our disabilities, some seen and others unseen. Regardless, God knows and accepts our weakness and loves us.

Many of those unable to come to a regular church service may be under stress due to health matters. They may be in pain, feeling anxiety about their future, and in need of personal support. As a Eucharistic Visitor, we must endeavor to understand what it is like to suffer as others do, while at the same time maintaining the abiding faith that Jesus Christ is already and always at work in that person's life. This understanding is not intended to convince or "cheer," but rather to faithfully maintain one's own attitude of faith and hope in God as we listen and empathize.

⁸ Episcopal Diocese of Albany, Handbook for Eucharistic Ministers and /Eucharistic Visitors

WEEK 3--Open with Prayer

Practical information

1. Equipment and Materials

Each Eucharistic Visitor should have available:

- A Communion Kit with vessels for bread and wine, a corporal, purificators, a chalice, and paten of dignified proportions
- Sufficient copies of the approved service pamphlets so that everyone present can have one. You may also leave a copy for someone if they ask to keep it.
- Lectionary Readings for the day

Your supervising Deacon or Priest will be able to assist you in obtaining any equipment and materials needed.

2. Preparing Yourself

In preparation for your visit, uphold the person(s) in prayer to whom you will be privileged to bear the Body and Blood of the Lord. Pray that you may be an able and compassionate Eucharistic Visitor.

3. Be Informed

Your supervising Deacon or Priest will give you the names of one or more persons to whom you will carry the Holy Communion after the Eucharist. If visiting an individual for the first time, be certain to obtain appropriate background information that will help meet the pastoral needs of the individual and make your visit more effective. You should be aware of other family members in the home, if the individual can answer the telephone or not, special interests or past involvement with the church, any special needs for assistance, or other advice or comments your supervising Deacon or Priest may provide. In many parishes, at the Eucharist just before the Dismissal, Eucharistic Visitors go to the altar to be commissioned by the clergy to take the Communion to a specific person(s).

4. The Rite

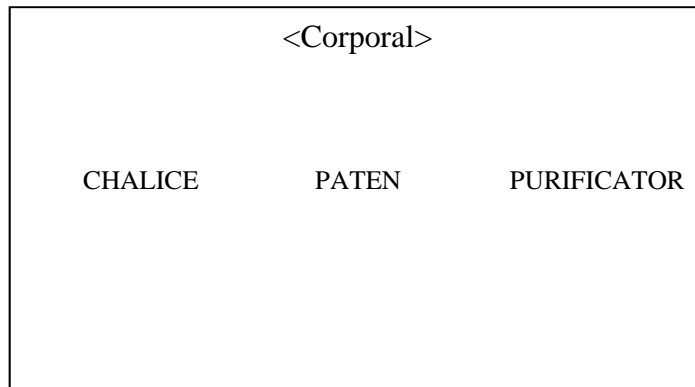
Each congregation in the Diocese has some printed form of "Communion Under Special Circumstances" that should be used when visiting. It is important to follow the rubrics carefully. Keep in mind that you are not performing a "mini-Mass." Rather, you are bringing the Sacrament to be shared with a fellow disciple as members of the Body of Christ.

After the scripture reading(s), the Eucharistic Visitor should relate information about the sermon that was offered during Eucharist on Sunday. Prayers may be offered briefly for the Church, the World, and the concerns of those present. After the Confession of Sin, a special form of absolution is offered by a layperson. Remember that you are a guest of the person you are visiting, whether in the home or the hospital. You are representing the Church, clergy, and congregation, and your actions and appearance should reflect the dignity of the ministry to which you have been called.

5. Setting Up and Distributing Communion

Upon arrival, introduce yourself to those present with the statement, “I’m here to bring you Communion from the Eucharist at _____ church.” This sets the tone for the visit and designates this Communion as an expression of the Christian Community’s one Eucharistic action.

Setting up may be a good time to talk with the person [or family and loved ones, as appropriate] about any special needs or concerns they may have, to be included in the Prayers and Intercessions. Inquire if there are any physical limitations, swallowing difficulties, or needs. [See *Frequently Asked Questions 4 & 5 below.*] Setting up may involve clearing a space for the corporal, chalice, and paten. It is important to create a space which is clean and uncluttered so that the Communion Bread and Wine can be given proper reverence and dignity. Illustration of how to arrange the Communion vessels and linen:



Conduct the service in a reverent manner. Do not stand or sit with your back to the Blessed Sacrament. Others present may be invited to join in the service. All baptized Christians are welcome to receive. Hosts may be broken to accommodate more than the planned number of communicants. After the last Communion, consume the remaining Bread and Wine. An important point is to take your time in order to be fully present to God and the other person.

6. Cleaning Up

After everyone has received the Body and Blood of the Lord, any remaining Sacrament should be consumed by the Eucharistic Visitor in a reverent manner. The Paten should be wiped clean with the Purificator, brushing any crumbs of the Host into the Chalice. A small amount of water should then be poured into the Chalice, and the water respectfully consumed by the Eucharistic Visitor.

7. Record Keeping

Accurate record keeping will be an important tool in assessing, developing, and evaluating this ministry. Any specified forms or emails should be filled out and left for your Rector in an agreed upon location.

8. Afterwards

You may want to pause to reflect a few moments on what you have just done, on how God is using you; and to give thanks for this opportunity to serve Christ in your brothers and sisters. Report to your supervising Deacon or Rector on your Eucharistic visits and make note of any special needs or pastoral concerns that came to your attention during these visits. The visit is considered “complete” only when this communication is made. Do not discuss the person’s health with others.

Pastoral Issues and Concerns

Words alone do not communicate adequately God’s love for the people we are visiting; our actions and attitudes speak volumes about the comfort and hope offered in the Gospel and the Blessed Sacrament. Some of the ways in which we communicate our Faith are very practical. For example:

- **Get on their “eye level.”** If the person you are visiting is bedbound or sitting in a low chair, do not stay standing: sit. Standing over someone communicates that you want to leave soon, or that you are, in a sense, superior to him or her.
- **“Be there” with the person.** Listen and wait. Give them time to express themselves, or be silent. Your presence with them is very comforting and meaningful to them. Theologians speak in terms of the “sacrament” of *being there with* persons. By our attention and loving ministry to the people we visit, they are reminded of how much God loves them and continues to be present in their lives through the Holy Spirit. Our words, our actions, and our prayers should all communicate God’s loving Presence in their time of weakness and need.
- **Enough time should be allocated** to conduct the Communion Service and to listen to the person’s immediate concerns. Eucharistic Visits will vary in length, but should neither be rushed nor overly protracted.
- **Remind them of their own ministry:** to pray for the needs of others and to uphold the clergy, vestry and other ministries of the Church. Ask them to pray for you and other ministries; tell them of other specific needs so that they may intercede for family, neighbors, and friends. This is not merely “talk,” or “giving them something to do”: it is a powerful tool that connects the person you are visiting to the larger congregation.
- **Communicate.** Your parish’s clergy need to know if there is a particular need or issue that you encounter: an expressed desire for Confession and Absolution; signs of depression and sense of hopelessness; something observed that appears to require nursing care or medical attention; a family issue that is problematic or potentially so. As a Eucharistic Visitor, it is not appropriate to engage in counseling or become involved in medical issues.

WEEK 4—Open With Prayer

Frequently Asked Questions

Experienced Eucharistic Visitors can recount any number of unexpected and sometimes unique circumstances that they have encountered during their ministry. The following questions and answers may help you be prepared for some of these situations:

1. What if no one is home?

This problem can be avoided by calling ahead and scheduling a time for your visit. This will depend when the Eucharist is ended and on the schedule of the family being visited. Quite often, if it is a nursing home or hospital visit, no prior appointment is necessary.

2. Do I leave for my visit immediately after the Eucharist has ended, or can I attend Christian Education and/or the coffee hour before I leave Church?

Taking communion from the Church's Eucharist means bringing the person who is "shut-in" into the corporate body of Christ and the parish by your actions, and as such should be as close to the end of the service as possible. Discuss this with your supervising Deacon or Priest.

3. What if I do not have enough Hosts/bread? What is the correct way to handle this situation?

First, ask if everyone would like to take part in receiving communion. Next, if there are more people than hosts, it is acceptable to break the Hosts in half. Be careful not to crumble them into small pieces.

4. Are there cases when I should not offer the Wine?

Often, the small amount of Wine given will not be a problem for dietary or medication restrictions. However, it is very important to remember that someone who is sick or infirm (especially if they are a hospital patient or nursing home resident) may (a) have dietary restrictions, (b) be taking medications that can interact with even a small sip of alcohol, and/or (c) have a swallowing problem. In an institutional setting, the nurse-in-charge or medication nurse should be asked if any of these restrictions apply. In a home setting, a family member should be consulted concerning this.

5. If the person I am visiting has difficulty in swallowing, how is Communion to be administered?

It depends upon the severity of the swallowing difficulty. Even a small piece of Host can cause choking, blockage of the airway, or aspiration pneumonia for someone with a swallowing difficulty (*dysphagia*). In a home setting, a family member should be consulted. In an institutional setting, the nurse-in-charge or medication nurse should be asked regarding any swallowing restrictions.

If the person being visited is able to swallow, but with difficulty, it is acceptable to place a small piece of Host directly on their tongue; or to place the Host on a spoon (with a little Wine added to soften the Host) and place the spoon in their mouth.

In a case where a person is unable to swallow, the following rubric from the Book of Common Prayer [p. 457] should be read, or communicated in other simple words:

If a person desires to receive the Sacrament, but, by reason of extreme sickness or physical disability, is unable to eat and drink the Bread and Wine, the Deacon is to assure that person that all the benefits of Communion are received, even though the Sacrament is not received with the mouth.

6. Several times when I have visited people in the hospital, staff persons have come in to take blood pressure or some other procedure during Communion. How should I handle this?

In many cases, the medical staff will give you the time needed to complete whatever you are doing. Just tell them you will only be a little while longer. You might wish to ask the medical staff if they would like to join you in prayer or communion. Many times, we forget this part of our ministry. If an emergency occurs during your visit, get out of the way and pray for the person and the medical team ministering to the person. Notify the clergy.

7. When should the Communion Kit be returned to the Church?

This should be decided by your Supervising Deacon or Priest. Normally, the Communion Kit is to be returned to the Church as soon as the last person has been visited.

Eucharist Visitor Prayers
Below are a few comfort prayers that could be handed out on a visit.

A Prayer of Thomas Merton

God, we have no idea where we are going. We do not see the road ahead of us. We cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we are following your will does not mean that we are actually doing so. But we believe the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope we have that desire in all that we are doing. We hope that we will never do anything apart from that desire. And we know that if we do this you will lead us by the right road, though we may know nothing about it. Therefore, we will trust you always though we may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. We will not fear, for you are ever with us, and you will never leave us to face our perils alone. Amen.

Prayer of the chalice

*Almighty God, to you I raise my whole being
--a vessel emptied of self. Accept, Lord, this
my emptiness, and so fill me with Yourself--
Your Light, Your Love, Your Life - that these
Your precious Gifts may radiate through
me and over flow the chalice of my
heart into the hearts of all with
whom I come in contact this
day, revealing to them
the beauty of
Your Joy
and
Whole-
ness
and
the
Serenity
of Your Peace
which nothing can destroy.*

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

A Celtic Prayer

Deep peace of the running waves to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the Son of Peace to you.

HEALING PRAYERS FROM THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYERS

Prayers for use by a Sick Person

For Trust in God

O God, the source of all health: So fill my heart with faith in your love, that with calm expectancy I may make room for your power to possess me, and gracefully accept your healing; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In Pain

Lord Jesus Christ, by your patience in suffering you hallowed earthly pain and gave us the example of obedience to your Father's will: Be near me in my time of weakness and pain; sustain me by your grace, that my strength and courage may not fail; heal me according to your will; and help me always to believe that what happens to me here is of little account if you hold me in eternal life, my Lord and my God. Amen.

For Sleep

O heavenly Father, you give your children sleep for the refreshing of soul and body: Grant me this gift, I pray; keep me in that perfect peace which you have promised to those whose minds are fixed on you; and give me such a sense of your presence, that in the hours of silence I may enjoy the blessed assurance of your love; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

In the Morning

This is another day, O Lord. I know not what it will bring forth, but make me ready, Lord, for whatever it may be. If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely. If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly. If I am to lie low, help me to do it patiently. And if I am to do nothing, let me do it gallantly. Make these words more than words, and give me the Spirit of Jesus. Amen.

Ministration to the Sick BCP Page 461

WRITING ASSIGNMENT:

How will I prepare myself to make a Eucharist Visit?

Notes: