

Memo

Date: October 26, 2006
To: All Priests and Deacons serving in the Archdiocese of Atlanta
From: Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory
RE: Lay Ministers and the Purification of Vessels

You may be aware that the 2002 edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) stipulated that the purification of vessels at Mass be done by the priest, deacon, or an instituted acolyte. (No. 278) Because of the common practice in this country of giving communion under both species at large masses with many extraordinary ministers, the bishops of the United States at that time requested permission for lay extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist in purifying vessels. In response, that same year the Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments granted an indult permitting bishops “to grant celebrants the faculty to permit extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion to assist with the purification of sacred vessels after the distribution of Communion at mass.” (Prot. 1382/01/L) That indult was granted for a period of three years. When the indult expired in 2005, the American bishops requested that it be extended or made permanent. The Prefect of the Congregation of Divine Worship placed the issue before His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, who declined to extend the indult, and thus the universal law now also applies to the United States of America.

For that reason, beginning with the ***First Sunday of Advent in 2006***, parishes in the Archdiocese of Atlanta are requested to see that all sacred vessels are purified by a priest, deacon, or instituted acolyte. I am aware that this may cause some hardship in parishes with large congregations and the custom of distributing communion under both species, especially when no deacon or instituted acolyte is available. Several pastoral measures are available to make this transition easier. The GIRM permits that vessels be purified either after communion or after mass, and parishes with large numbers of vessels may find it more convenient to do so after mass. In any case, all of the Precious Blood that remains should be consumed at the end of communion. In the Archdiocese of Atlanta, the permission for extraordinary ministers to consume any of the precious blood that remains after communion continues in effect. While the Prefect of the Congregation, in his letter, mentions two additional pastoral approaches: the distribution of Holy Communion under only one species or the use of intinction, at present the use of intinction is not encouraged in the Archdiocese of Atlanta. The choice to distribute communion under one or both kinds remains at the discretion of the priest.