

Anglican Diocese of San Joaquin  
**Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Minister Study Guide**

*A Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Minister (PLEM) is also known as a Eucharistic Visitor.* PLEM candidates are also responsible for the material contained in the Lay Eucharistic Minister Study Guide, which should be studied first.

### **Canonical Basis**

Everything that has already been said about the extraordinary nature of licensed lay ministry with respect to Eucharistic Ministers applies with even greater acuity to PLEMs. It is not lay ministry, *per se*, but is a delegated clerical ministry. For this reason, both the spirit and the letter of the enabling canons set very strict rules. It is essential that these rules be strictly followed; to do otherwise creates a situation of abuse, which can disrupt the good order of the church and confuse the faithful.

The mission of a PLEM is to extend the Eucharistic community to those parishioners who have been and desire to continue as regular communicants, but who are prevented by chronic illness or debility. By having the Blessed Sacrament brought to them shortly after the main celebration of the Eucharist, such persons are able to keep the Lord's Day with the larger community of the faithful.

As a PLEM, you will deliver the sacrament...

- *...directly after the Sunday celebration.* In most instances, PLEMs do not even stay for Coffee Hour, but are dismissed with prayer right after the administration of communion. At the latest the visit should be completed on the same day and never deferred to a weekday.
- *...to persons in their own homes, or in long-term care facilities.* In other words, the PLEM canons are designed to accommodate those who are *chronically* unable to attend the liturgy. Those who are hospitalized for the usual temporary reasons are not appropriate objects of PLEM ministry, but should be visited by a priest.
- *...only to those whom your priest has specifically asked you to visit.* This is perhaps one of the few instances in life where imagination and initiative are **not** appropriate! Your priest may

be in possession of pastoral information you do not have which would make a visit inadvisable.

### **Relevant Liturgical/Sacramental Theology**

A key New Testament word that affect our understanding of the Eucharist, particularly as it relates to the ministry of a PLEM is *koinonia*. *Koinonia* is usually translated “fellowship” or “communion,” but both those English words may be too weak in their connotations. *Koinonia* indicates a profoundly intimate relationship—shared participation in the same life. The Eucharist is Holy Communion—holy *koinonia*—between the communicant and the living Christ, and between the communicant and the rest of the church through Christ. It connects us “vertically” with God, and “horizontally” with our fellow Christians.

It is for this reason precisely that the Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is of such paramount importance, and why attendance at Sunday worship “unless reasonably prevented” is listed as the *first duty* of the Laity in the canons of the Anglican Church in North America. If it were merely a matter of receiving the consecrated bread and wine of Holy Communion as a matter of “spiritual hygiene,” then there would scarcely be a need for PLEMs. A priest could occasionally celebrate a home Eucharist, or a deacon could regularly bring the reserved sacrament at a convenient time during the week.

What such arrangements fail to account for, however, is the “horizontal” element of the sacrament, *koinonia* with the community of the baptized, assembled for its “work,” its liturgy. Maintaining a connection with this dimension of the Eucharist is what the ministry of a PLEM makes possible. By bringing the sacrament, as it were, “fresh” from the altar, the PLEM is a living extension of the Eucharistic community, a human bridge connecting the homebound parishioner with the community he or she longs to be with.

### **Spirituality & Practice of Pastoral Care-Giving**

Effective pastoral ministry—whether exercised by an ordained minister, or by a lay person such as a PLEM—is more an art than a science. Your supervising priest will coach you and serve as a mentor as you develop your technique in this new “artistic” endeavor. The following considerations may be helpful in this context:

- *You represent the wider church.* This may seem so obvious that it need not be repeated. Yet, it is easily forgotten. You are there as a human presence, visiting another real human being, so you should be authentic, i.e. “be yourself.” At the same time, however, you are “more” than yourself. You are a living icon of the whole community of the Church. You literally re-present that innumerable community in your own person when you are functioning in your ministry. This is serious business! It is a matter of stewardship—something precious has been entrusted to you.
- *Communicate confidence and peace.* The person you are visiting is probably anxious about a great many things. Your job is to be a non-anxious presence. Leave your own anxieties on the doorstep—particularly those that relate to parish politics and similar issues.
- *Stay on task.* A small amount of chit-chat, small talk, is OK, and probably even necessary. More than a small amount, however, will over-personalize your visit, and obscure its primary purpose. If you just want to have a visit for the sake of a personal visit, come back another time when you are not wearing your PLEM “hat.” Remember, too, that those who are homebound may tire easily, yet be too gracious to tell you. On the other hand, they may be starving for company, and quite willing to drain you dry in one sitting! So it is important to set clear and appropriate boundaries in your own mind, and stick to them.
- *Keep confidences*—but try to avoid situations where they might be shared. There is sometimes a fine line between healthy confidences and unhealthy secrets. Secrets can poison the “family system” of a parish, and even the homebound are part of that system! The best course is to stick to your job: deliver the sacrament, be kind and compassionate, but resist being drawn into “fixing” things in the person’s life.

## **Applicable Liturgical Form**

The form for the administration of Holy Communion by a Pastoral Lay Eucharistic Minister is found in the *Book of Common Prayer* (p.227-231.) This is the only authorized form, and you should be intimately familiar with its text, rubrics, and guidelines. (Questions from this material will be included on the examination.)

- Officiating at this rite will require that you have the Psalm and the Gospel reading from the lectionary for that day. This can easily be done by bringing a copy of your church's bulletin or insert with you.
- Ask your supervising clergy for guidance about making "comments" on the sermon that was delivered at the liturgy.
- Additional prayers can be found after the service in the Book of Common Prayer. It can be very beneficial to add a prayer relating to the person's situation. Additional prayers are prayed after the readings.
- The Book of Common Prayer also gives a list of readings that can be beneficial for the sick in different situations. It can be good to inform the person being visited about some of those passages that may help.

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