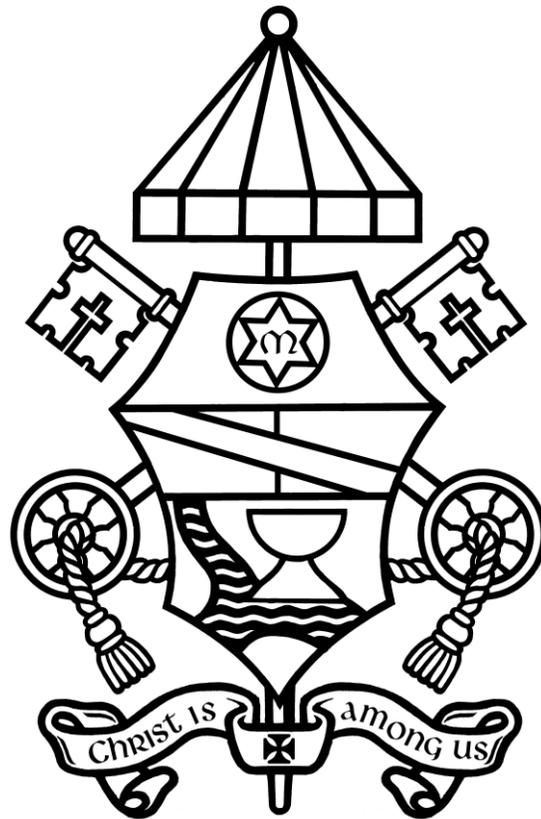


THE BASILICA OF  
SAINT MARY  
OF THE ASSUMPTION



LITURGICAL MINISTRY HANDBOOK

# Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion

January 2014  
Marietta, Ohio

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## **INTRODUCTION**

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“The sacred liturgy is at the center, at the heart, of the life of the Church. It gives life to the Church. It builds up the Mystical Body of Christ. It manifests the nature of the Church. It empowers the Church to carry out her mission.”

- Cardinal Francis Arinze  
Prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship  
and the Discipline of the Sacraments

**THE MOST IMPORTANT** thing that we do as Catholics is celebrating the Holy Mass! It is through the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, that the Lord breathes life into the Church and fashions the Church and each Christian more fully into the image of Jesus Christ.

By virtue of baptism in Christ, every Catholic is called to participate in the Mass in a **“full, conscious and active”** way, as demanded by the Second Vatican Council (*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, #14). Does that mean that everyone should take on a ministry in the Mass? **No!** Pope John Paul II clarified this when he said: “Active participation certainly means that, in gesture, word, song and service, all the members of the community take part in an act of worship, which is anything but inert or passive. **Yet active participation does not preclude the active passivity of silence, stillness and listening: indeed, it demands it.**” (*Ad Limina* Address to Bishops of the United States, 1998). By attentively listening, singing, saying the responses, and entering into prayerful silence each of us does in fact fulfill the mandate of the Second Vatican Council.

But some of the faithful are also **called upon to fulfill various liturgical roles** and so **assist the entire assembly** in entering more fully into the mysteries being celebrated. “The faithful, moreover, should not refuse to serve the People of God gladly whenever they are asked to perform some particular ministry or function in the celebration” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, #97).

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## **THE ROLE OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MINISTER**

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“For when the hour had come for him to be glorified by you, Father most holy, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end: and while they were at supper, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, take this, all of you, and eat of it: for this is my body which will be given up for you.”

- Eucharistic Prayer IV

**The Holy Eucharist is the greatest treasure of the Church since it truly is Christ Himself, the source of all blessings and joy.** Jesus Christ is the center of our Christian faith, and the Eucharist is Jesus Christ made manifest – Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. There is nothing more sacred, nothing more important than the Holy Eucharist.

One of the most sacred moments in the celebration of the Eucharist is the Rite of Communion, when each of the faithful receives Jesus Christ in all of His fullness under the appearance of bread and wine. Those entrusted with distributing the Holy Eucharist to the faithful take on a noble task, and a serious responsibility.

Following the Second Vatican Council, there was a lot of debate about what to call the lay faithful who help distribute Holy Communion. Several years ago the Vatican has ended the debate by instructing that they are to be called **“Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.”** Properly speaking the clergy are the ordinary ministers of Communion – by virtue of their ordination, they are entrusted with the task of giving the Holy Eucharist (and really all the sacraments) to the faithful. The lay faithful sometimes can assist with this, but only when necessary (for example: when a priest is physically incapable of distributing Communion, or when it would take too long for the priest to distribute Communion alone because of the size of the assembly, and so on). Bishops, priests and deacons are the primary and ordinary ministers of the Sacrament of the Eucharist, because of the sacramental character that they have received through the Sacrament of Holy Orders (see *Code of Canon Law*, can. 910).

Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion (EMHC for short) assist in the distribution of the Holy Eucharist for Sunday Masses, Holy Days of Obligation and other special days (e.g. Holy Thursday). EMHC also assist at weekday Masses, and sometimes bring the Eucharist to the sick and homebound. These Guidelines are intended to ensure that proper reverence and respect is given to Our Lord in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Moreover, they will assist us so that our actions and words add to the moment when the person receives the Body and Blood of Christ. Since these actions and words occur during a very special part of the Mass, and at a sacred and personal time for the communicant, it is important that we as a group, and as individuals, conduct our ministry in a respectful and holy manner. We should strive to communicate reverence and dignity in the performance of our duties without being overly formal or stiff.

Though these Guidelines are in some detail, they cannot cover every possibility that may occur. It is helpful to keep two thoughts in mind when things don’t go according to plan:

1. Respect for the Eucharist: always move and act in a respectful way.
2. Minister to others: remember that you are serving others and strive to make them comfortable at a very holy time for them.

The *General Instruction of Roman Missal* provides excellent guidance in the thought: **“The gestures and posture of the priest, the deacon, and the ministers...ought to contribute to making the entire celebration resplendent with beauty and noble simplicity...”** (#42).

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## **QUALIFICATIONS**

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For a person to be commissioned as an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion at St. Mary’s Basilica, he or she must meet the following requirements:

1. Be a Baptized and Confirmed member of the Church.
2. Be a person of upstanding Christian character, striving to live the faith to the best of his or her ability.
3. Practice Catholic morality as taught by the Magisterium and explained in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
4. Attend Mass every Sunday and Holy Day of Obligation (either at St. Mary’s or some other Catholic Church).
5. Be in a lawful marriage in the eyes of the Church (if you are married).
6. Be a registered member of the parish.

***PLEASE NOTE: It is essential that EMHC be present at the liturgies for which they are assigned, or make arrangements for a replacement.*** Simply contact any of the other EMHC and ask them to cover for you. If you are unable to find a replacement, please at least call the rectory so that the priest can notify the captain before Mass. Also note that the schedule is usually made out for several months at a time, so please notify the Pastoral Associate, who handles the scheduling, if you will be out of town for several weeks or months. Those who consistently fail to fulfill their assigned duties may be removed from the schedule.

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## **PREPARATION**

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Preparation begins before we leave home as we should dress appropriately for the ministry. ***Appropriate dress does not include*** blue jeans, T shirts, tank tops, shorts, flip-flops, or low-cut necklines. Ideally men would wear suit jackets and/or ties with a dress shirt, and ladies would wear dresses or appropriate dress clothes. We need to remember respect for the Eucharist, and that we minister at a holy and special time to the congregation.

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## **WHEN ARRIVING AT CHURCH**

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Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are expected to arrive at the basilica ***at least 15 minutes before Mass begins.*** Once you arrive, you ***must go to the sacristy and sign in.***

One of the EMHC at each Mass will be identified on the schedule as the **CAPTAIN**. The duty of the captain is to make sure that enough Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion are present for Mass. The captain is also to ensure that the Lector is present for Mass. If the assigned people have not signed in ***10 minutes before Mass***, the captain's duty is to recruit new volunteers.

If you are scheduled to help with Communion and have not signed in, please do not come forward to distribute communion because the captain will already have arranged for new volunteers.

Extraordinary ministers are asked to sit (along with their families) ***toward the front of the basilica.*** Given the size of our basilica, sitting even halfway back draws undue attention to the EMHC as they walk up to assist with Communion. The time spent in the pew before Mass is a good opportunity to prepare yourself through prayer and reflection on the Eucharist.

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## **PROCEDURE FOR COMMUNION**

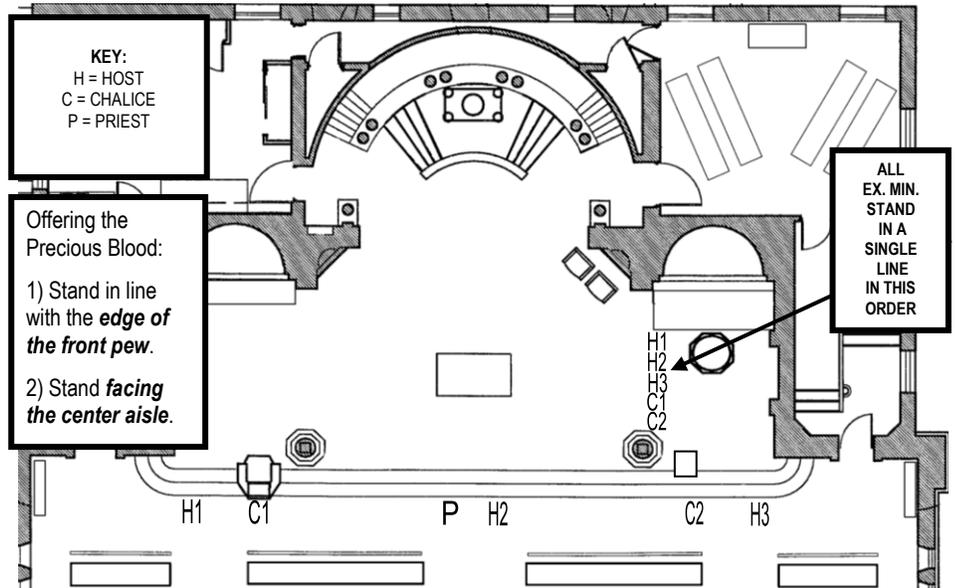
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"In the action of the Eucharist this bread and this wine become our spiritual food and drink. It is Christ, the true vine, who gives life to the branches. As bread from heaven, bread of angels, the chalice of salvation, the medicine of immortality, the Eucharist is the promise of eternal life to all who eat and drink it.

- Norms for the Distribution & Reception of Holy Communion  
under both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America, 4

EMHC are to come forward during the **Sign of Peace**. You should briefly exchange the sign of peace with those nearest to you and come forward to the base of the sanctuary steps. Once all the EMHC have gathered, you bow to the altar then walk to the right of the altar, and up the steps on the right side of the pillar (and cantor stand). Line up in the sanctuary as shown in the diagram (at right).

Keeping in mind the solemnity of this moment in the Mass, the EMHC should remain in silence. This is **not** the proper time to exchange the sign of peace with the other extraordinary ministers.



After giving Communion to the altar servers, the priest will bring Communion to you, and you make the customary bow and response. After all the EMHC have received Communion the priest will give each of you a paten/bowl or a chalice. (The chalice bearers should offer the Precious Blood to the other EMHC.) Wait until the priest moves into position before going to your stations.

There are **four stations to offer the Sacred Hosts**. The priest will always take the center aisle, on the Ambo (pulpit) side. If the deacon is present, he will always distribute the Hosts next to the priest (taking the H2 position in the diagram). Your station is determined by where you are standing on the mosaic line. (See diagram above.) The person in the center (of the Host Bearers) will distribute in the center next to the priest (if there is no deacon). The person standing closest to the pews will distribute on the Holy Family (Wooster Street) side. The person standing furthest into the sanctuary will cross over and distribute on the Crucifixion (Rectory) side of the basilica.

There are **two stations to offer the Precious Blood**. The person standing closest to the pews will distribute on the Holy Family (Wooster Street) side, and the other person will cross over and distribute on the Crucifixion (Rectory) side of the basilica. Each of these people needs to stand **in line with the edge of the front pew, facing the center of the basilica**. This allows for a long line to form for the chalice. (The people from the side aisles are welcome to walk around and join the line to receive the Precious Blood.)

**PLEASE NOTE: Only the priest is to walk behind the altar. Extraordinary ministers are to walk in front of the altar when crossing to the other side of the basilica, unless directed by the priest to do otherwise.**

Keep in mind the infinite treasure that you carry with you in the Most Holy Eucharist. Your movements, gestures and words should convey the deepest sense of reverence. Avoid holding the host in your hand when walking or gesturing. Only hold the host when giving it to a communicant.

**When giving the Precious Body:** Hold the Host at eye-level with the communicant and say: “The Body of Christ.” **Note that THERE IS NO “This is...” in the words.** Most people receive in the hand; however a few people receive on the tongue. This is not a problem as the host will easily adhere to the tongue. You will learn a very simple and effective way to give Communion on the tongue in the training session.

**When giving the Precious Blood:** Hold the chalice at eye-level with the communicant and say: “The Blood of Christ.” **Note that THERE IS NO “This is...” in the words.** Gently hand the communicant the chalice, being sure not to let go until you are sure they have a firm grip on it. After they return the chalice to you, wipe the rim where the communicant’s mouth touched the chalice and turn the chalice approximately one quarter of a turn before offering the Precious Blood to the next communicant.

After you have distributed Holy Communion at your station you may assist another EMHC if there are more than 20 people in line. Unless the line is extraordinarily long, EMHC need not assist the priest; some people simply prefer to receive Communion directly from the priest.

When you have finished distributing Communion, return to the sanctuary (walking in front of the altar if necessary), and **stand along the mosaic line**, holding your paten/bowl or chalice in your hand. (**Remember that you should never bow to the altar or the priest when you are holding the Eucharist; it makes no sense to bow to a symbol of Christ when you are holding Christ Himself!**) The priest will take the paten/bowl or chalice and place it on the altar. When all have returned their vessels to the priest, the extraordinary ministers go to the base of the sanctuary steps and bow as the priest genuflects at the tabernacle. You may then return to your seats.

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## WHAT IF...

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**...there are additional clergy at Mass who could help with Communion?**

If you ever attend a Mass in which you were assigned to be an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion and there are additional clergy (bishops, priests or deacons) present, be sure to allow them to distribute Holy Communion. Remember that bishops, priests, and deacons are the Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion. By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders it is the duty of the clergy to distribute Holy Communion to the faithful. The laity are only to assist with Communion if there is a specific need. (That is why they are properly called Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion.) **For every additional clergyman present at Mass, one less EMHC should come forward to assist with Communion.**

**...you’re not sure if the person should receive Communion?**

We should offer the Eucharist to each person who approaches and wishes to receive, and not refuse anyone unless they seem completely unfamiliar with receiving. In such case, discreetly ask if they are a Catholic. If they reply “no,” explain that only Catholics receive the Eucharist and ask them to please move on. Sometimes you may wonder about offering the Eucharist to a small child. Usually, an adult is with a child and will move them along if they are too young to receive Communion. Regardless of the child’s size, we should offer the Eucharist if they approach, wish to receive and seem familiar with receiving.

**...a person wants a blessing?**

We **DO NOT GIVE BLESSINGS** in the Communion Procession. (Moreover, the lay faithful do not offer blessings in any circumstances.) However, if someone comes up and has his or her hands crossed at the chest, that person may expect you to say something. You may say **“May the peace of the Lord be with you.”**

### ***...you run out of hosts?***

If you run out of hosts and still have people in your line, you may get additional hosts from the priest or another EMHC being careful to transfer the hosts between the vessels in a respectful manner. When you realize there are not enough hosts, it is acceptable to break the hosts (usually into halves) and give each communicant a piece.

### ***...a Host falls on the floor?***

All Catholics, but especially extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion, need to know that the Church teaches that Jesus Christ is present in every particle of the Sacred Host and every drop of the Precious Blood. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains: ***“The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ”*** (#1377). Since Christ is truly present in every crumb of consecrated the bread and every drop of the consecrated wine, even these tiny particles must be treated with the utmost reverence.

If a host or part of the host drops to the floor, ***immediately pick it up*** and put it in the hand you are using to hold the bowl. ***DO NOT put it back into the bowl or offer it to another communicant.*** After you finish distributing, you should consume the host yourself or offer it to the priest when returning your paten/bowl at the altar.

### ***...some of the Precious Blood spills on the floor?***

Remain calm, and act in a reverent and clear-headed way. The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* indicates the basics of what is to be done: ***“If any of the Precious Blood is spilled, the area where the spill occurred should be washed with water, and this water should then be poured into the sacrarium in the sacristy”*** (#280).

***If the spill is small***, guard the spill with your body by standing in a way that prevents people from stepping on it. Continue to distribute the Precious Blood being aware of the spill on the floor and continuing to guard it. Once Communion is finished, lay your purificator over the spot of the spill and return to the altar as normal, informing the priest. As the other EMHC return to their seats, you should go to the sacristy and locate a wet towel and another dry towel or some paper towels. At the end of Mass, as the priest and servers are processing out of the basilica, go to the place of the spill, walking from the side door (not going through the sanctuary). Using the wet towel, wipe down the place of the spill and dry the place so that no one will slip on the wet surface. Carefully bring the wet towel into the sacristy and place it in the sacrarium (the sink with the lid on it). The priest will take care of the rest.

***If the spill is large***, immediately lay your purificator over the spot, take the chalice back into the sacristy, and bring some cloth towels and a clean purificator to the place of the spill. Use the towels to soak up the Precious Blood. When it's all been removed from the floor, lay the clean purificator over the spot, return to the sacristy and follow the directions above.

### ***...you are distributing from the chalice and someone wants to dip the Host in it?***

Dipping the Host into the Precious Blood is referred to as “intinction” by the Church. Communicants are never permitted to do this, because it is a form of self-communication. ***“The communicant, including the extraordinary minister, is never allowed to self-communicate, even by means of intinction”*** (*Norms for the*

*Distribution and Reception of Holy Communion Under Both Kinds in the Dioceses of the United States of America*, 50). Only bishops and priests are allowed to “take” Communion because of their sacred consecration into the ministerial priesthood of Christ. All others (including even deacons) must “receive” Communion from another person. Moreover, only bishops and priests may give Communion to the faithful by intinction (ibid, 49). However, intinction is not the ordinary way to distribute or receive Holy Communion in the Latin Church and therefore is not very common.

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## **BRINGING HOLY COMMUNION TO THE SICK AND HOMEBOUND**

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Some EMHC perform the noble service of bringing the Holy Eucharist to people who are not able to come to Mass. They bring the greatest treasure of the Church, the Eucharistic Christ, and help those souls maintain a connection to the life of the parish.

Due to some confusion, the practice has developed in which those who are taking Holy Communion to the sick present a pyx for receiving a Host when they themselves go to Communion. The proper procedure is for the EMHC to receive the pyx containing the Eucharistic Host apart from their own reception of Communion. Each EMHC bringing Holy Communion to the sick should come to the sacristy before Mass begins, present a pyx to the priest and request the number of Hosts needed. After the final prayer of Mass (the Prayer After Communion), these Extraordinary Ministers are to come up to the altar. The priest will give them a pyx containing the sacred host(s), offer a prayer for them and dismiss them from the Mass. ***Once they have been dismissed they are to go directly to the faithful who will be receiving Communion from them.***

Those bearing the Holy Eucharist must be aware of the infinite treasure they carry. ***They are to show the utmost reverence for Christ truly present in the Sacred Host.*** They should not engage in conversations after Mass, and should never carry the Eucharist with them on any unnecessary errands (such as a stop at the grocery store). They have been commissioned for this sacred task, and must keep in mind that they are bearing Christ Himself. When giving Holy Communion to the faithful outside of Mass, it is important to maintain the sacredness of the Eucharist and the action of receiving Holy Communion. To assist with this, it is strongly recommended that EMHC use the ***Rite for Distributing Holy Communion Outside of Mass*** provided with this handbook.

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## **CONCLUSION**

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It is an honor and a privilege to be able to give the Holy Eucharist to Christ’s faithful, as well as a great responsibility to be entrusted with the Church’s greatest treasure: Christ Himself. Those who engage in this ministry have a duty to strive to grow in their own love and devotion to the Holy Eucharist so that they can be more faithful witnesses of the love of Christ truly present in our midst.

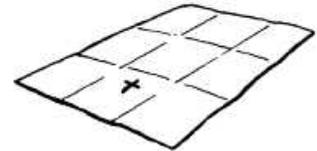
Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion offer a wonderful service to the parish, and their service is greatly appreciated. Those who approach this service of the Lord with humility and faith will doubtless reap many blessings from Christ, and further their own growth as Christian disciples.

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## GLOSSARY

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- **Altar Cloth** – large white cloth that covers the top of the altar.
- **Ambo (or Pulpit)** – place where the readings are proclaimed.
- **Chalice** – special cup used by the priest at Mass.
- **Chalice Veil** – cover that goes over the chalice.
- **Ciborium** – container used to store the hosts in the tabernacle.
- **Corporal** – white cloth placed on the altar for Mass.
- **Credence Table** – table where vessels used during Mass are placed.
- **Easter Candle** (also called Paschal Candle) – very large candle used during the Easter season, for baptisms and funerals.
- **Pall** – stiff square card used to cover the chalice.
- **Paten** – bread plate (or bowl) used for Mass.
- **Purificator** – white cloth used to wipe the rim of the chalice.
- **Roman Missal** – book containing all the prayers for Mass.
- **Sacristy** – room where objects and vestments for Mass are stored, and where the priests and servers vest for Mass.
- **Sanctuary** – area at the top of the steps where the altar is located.
- **Tabernacle** – place the Eucharist is kept.



CORPORAL



PALL



CHALICE &  
PURIFICATOR

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## RESOURCES

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Visit the **LITURGICAL MINISTRY** page on [www.stmarysdre.info](http://www.stmarysdre.info) for the latest schedules and resources.

Contact Joe Schmidt at [stmarysdre@gmail.com](mailto:stmarysdre@gmail.com) or at 373-3643 with any questions.