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To the Priests, Deacons, Religious and Parish Liturgical Coordinators of the Catholic Diocese of Peoria:

As you have read in recent news articles and our diocesan monthly mailing, the Holy Father recently rescinded the dispensation for extraordinary ministers to assist in the purification of the sacred vessels during Mass. Various elements in the media have tried to foment controversy where there is none.

While there may be a need to make adjustments in our practices, especially in our larger parishes, I hope that all of us can understand this change as an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Eucharistic theology as well as the theology of the ordained priesthood. This is also another moment of the on-going liturgical movement that has been re-invigorated since the publication of the new Missal in 2000. We know that this is a special period of renewal and that more liturgical changes are coming. As leaders of liturgy in our parishes, we must make every effort to properly catechize, instruct and help our people.

In particular, I ask that all the parishes, religious houses and chapels of the Diocese of Peoria institute the new policy regarding the purification of sacred vessels no later than January 1, 2007. While the purification of sacred vessels is reserved to the ordained clergy – priests and deacons – and instituted acolytes, I think it important that we consider what this means.

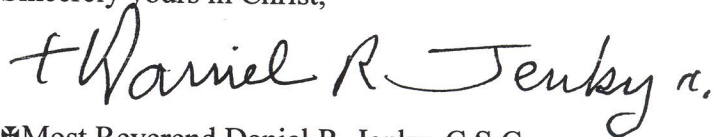
According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, paragraphs 278 and following, any fragments of the Eucharistic bread are normally wiped clean from the paten or ciborium with the purificator. These fragments could be wiped into a chalice. The chalice is purified with water, or wine and water, and is then drunk by the one purifying. The importance of purification is to guarantee that any drop of the Precious Blood is consumed. This purification may take place after Communion or even after Mass, and is generally done at the credence table.

It is important to note that the consuming of any Eucharistic particles and the ritual cleaning do not rule out a more thorough washing of the vessels. In fact, it is important to wash regularly the sacred vessels in hot water using soap or some other kind of germ-killing agent. While ritual purification is limited to the ordained, I encourage pastors to seek the continued help of their lay ministers and sacristans to guarantee the washing of the vessels.

Further, I do not expect this new instruction limiting who can purify the vessels to limit the regular distribution of the Precious Blood. Purifying the chalices, even after Mass, may require more diligence on behalf of priests and deacons, but it should in no way impede the faithful from receiving the full sign of Eucharistic Communion by receiving the Precious Blood from the chalice. Besides being the ancient practice of the Church, the distribution of the Precious Blood to the faithful was re-established by the fathers of Second Vatican Council and has been praised and encouraged by the Supreme Pontiffs since Pope Paul VI.

Let us join our prayers to those of Blessed Mary, Mother of the Eucharist that we may all continue to grow in our devotion to our Eucharistic Lord and His Holy Church.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daniel R. Jenky". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.  
BISHOP OF PEORIA

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