



Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.42

Anointing of the Sick

Approved By: Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, DD

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A. Communion to the Sick

It is the responsibility of the Pastor to ensure that the sick and aged are given every opportunity to receive Holy Communion frequently. In bringing them the Holy Eucharist, the Church manifests that special care and concern so frequently demonstrated by Christ in the Gospels. The sick, above all, need to be nourished by the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

Besides assuring the sick that they remain vital members of the parish community, these visits afford the pastor, deacon, or pastoral care minister the chance to explain the Christian significance of human suffering: that through their suffering and their faith, the sick are united to Christ in His suffering. Through prayer they can sanctify their suffering and draw strength in bearing it.

Ministry to the sick is to be seen as an important, consistent ministry in every parish. For example, parishes are encouraged to consider the following:

- inclusion of the sick of the parish in the General Intercessions at Mass;
- the prayerful departure of the deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion who at the conclusion of the Mass leave for their ministry among the sick and homebound;
- involvement of the deacons, the Pastoral Care staff or volunteers and other parishioners in the coordination of ministry by the entire parish to the sick, elderly and home-bound;
- when there are a number of sick parishioners confined to their homes or institutions who need to avail themselves of the Eucharist on a regular basis, deacons and Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion 1 should be delegated by the pastor for this purpose so that all the sick in the parish may receive Holy Communion frequently.

The pastor, deacon or pastoral care minister should also urge the sick to pray when they are alone or with their families or with those who care for them. He can suggest those passages from the Scriptures which speak of the mystery of human suffering and particularly of the sufferings of Christ. Prayers drawn from the Psalms are also most appropriate. The priest, deacon or Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion should always be ready to pray with the sick.

When scheduling visits to the sick in which deacons and Extraordinary Ministers of will assist, the pastor should arrange that he or another priest visit all the sick at regular intervals to afford them the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and, if necessary, the Sacrament of Anointing.

In taking the Blessed Sacrament to the sick, hosts should be carried in a pyx or other appropriate vessel carried on one's person and, as always, treated with the utmost reverence. Care should be taken that any unused hosts are returned immediately to the tabernacle or consumed, and not left in any other place.

The Rite for the Pastoral Care of the Sick indicates that sick people unable to receive the species of bread may receive under the species of wine alone.² Transporting the Precious Blood requires special care. An appropriate, leak proof container worthy of this purpose is to be used.

Those who live with or care for the sick at home should be instructed to make proper preparations for a reverent reception of the Eucharist.

A table should be prepared and covered with an appropriate cloth upon which the Blessed Sacrament can be placed. One or two lighted candles and holy water should also be placed on the table together with a glass of water and a spoon. Sometimes it may be best for the minister to carry these provisions for the rite, so as to instruct by example. Sometimes these preparations are not possible in a hospital or nursing home, particularly when a number of patients or residents will be receiving Holy Communion.³

When the distribution of Holy Communion in a hospital or nursing home takes place on a regular basis, parish volunteers can be most helpful in preparing the sick for Holy Communion prior to the arrival of the priest, deacon or extraordinary minister.

- They should ensure that practical preparations are provided for, such as seeing that the patient or resident is awake and, if possible, alert, and that the person is in the room or place where the minister can expect to find him or her.
- It is especially helpful if the volunteers can pray with the person in anticipation of the visit by the one who brings the Eucharist. Although such visits often presume a restricted time, the priest or minister should always use the a form of the rite provided for Communion in a hospital or an institution. This is a valuable opportunity to encourage the person in his or her suffering and give an opportunity for prayer, even if only briefly.

B. Anointing of the Sick

The Sacrament of Anointing is the proper sacrament for those Catholics who have attained the use of reason and whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age.⁴ Through this sacrament, the Church comforts and supports the person who is suffering and continues the healing ministry of Christ. The origins of this sacrament can be found in the New Testament.

"Is there anyone sick among you? Let him send for the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick man and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, they will be forgiven him" (James 5:14-15).

In preparation for anointing a sick person, the priest, who is the only minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, should usually provide an opportunity for sacramental confession and absolution. In the case of grave sin, the reception of sacramental absolution is a necessary prerequisite for receiving the Sacrament of Anointing. It is important for the priest to encourage the sick person to make a sincere confession.

1. Subjects of the Rite

Only those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age are proper subjects for the sacrament.⁵ Thus, the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is intended for the "seriously impaired," not for persons who have reached a predetermined age (e.g., age 65), permanent disability does not necessarily constitute sufficient reason for anointing.

In summary, the following are proper subjects for this sacrament:

- in ordinary circumstances, the Anointing of the Sick and Eucharist, are licitly administered only to Catholics who are in the state of grace;
- other Christians may be anointed in danger of death or in some other grave necessity, when, in the judgment of the bishop, they
 - cannot approach a minister of their own denomination,
 - ask for the sacrament on their own,
 - manifest a Catholic faith in it, and
 - are properly disposed.⁶

Canon 844 also allows the priest to administer the Sacrament of Anointing to members of the Oriental Churches who do not enjoy full communion with the Catholic Church if they request this sacrament and are properly disposed.

- The Sacrament of Anointing is to be conferred only on those who are alive. ⁷ However, Canon 1005 allows that the sacrament be administered conditionally when there is any doubt about whether the person has in fact died. Every benefit of the doubt should be extended to the newly deceased person, as we simply do not know if the appearance of death coincides with the departure of any vestiges of life, consciousness or awareness on the part of the deceased. If there is no doubt of death, then prayers for the dead are appropriate.
- Those who are seriously ill, especially those who begin to be in danger of death due to sickness or old age;⁸
- Those about to undergo surgery when a serious illness is the reason for the surgery;⁹
- Seriously ill people if they fall into a more serious crisis during the same illness or, if after recovery, they develop a serious illness again;
- Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present;¹⁰
- If there is doubt whether the person is seriously ill, the priest may anoint.¹¹ Anointing of the Sick is not to be celebrated for those who are in danger of death but who are not seriously ill (e.g., a soldier going into battle), or for healthy people who are about to die from an extrinsic source (e.g., capital punishment). In both of these cases, the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist as Viaticum are the appropriate sacramental ministrations.

Ordinarily, those who are recovering from any form of chemical dependency do not qualify as subjects for this sacrament.

- The spiritual help and sacramental nourishment most appropriate to such persons are the same for all the Christian faithful: prayer, the spiritual need to express contrition via the Sacrament of Reconciliation and frequent reception of the Holy Eucharist. There is a special blessing in the Book of Blessings for this condition.
- However, actual recurrence of any serious illness or a more serious crisis in the same illness does qualify an individual as a subject for this sacrament.¹²

Children with serious illness can be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament.

- Small children without sufficient use of reason are not considered as candidates for the Sacrament of Anointing. Rather, the priest should use the prayers, readings and blessings for sick children as presented in Chapter Two of Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum. ¹³
- However, if there is any doubt as to whether a seriously ill child has sufficient use of reason, every benefit of the doubt is to be afforded and the child should be anointed.¹⁴

Those who once had the use of reason, but have subsequently lost their mental faculties due to senility, unconsciousness, mental illness or some other reason should be anointed.¹⁵

2. Celebration of Anointing

Anointing can be administered in a home or hospital, for an individual or in a communal celebration for several people.

- The faithful, especially the family and loved ones, are encouraged to participate.
- A communal celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing gathers together not only those who are to receive the sacrament but also the faithful of the parish community. Preparation for the celebration of anointing should include an explanation of the rite and prayer. If the parish community is to exercise a role in the communal celebration of anointing, they should be instructed in their role well in advance of the celebration. Through homilies and bulletin announcements, the Pastor can prepare the faithful to participate in the celebration along with the intended recipients of the anointing, and most importantly, urge all the parishioners to pray for those who will be anointed.
- The Pastor or his delegate should also provide the faithful with instruction as to the conditions required for those to receive the sacrament. In this way, they can invite the friends, family and neighbors who would benefit from reception of the sacrament. Above all, the Pastor or his delegate should see to it that those who will be receiving the sacrament are instructed as to the meaning and purpose of the sacrament.
- A communal celebration of anointing presents the pastor with an opportunity to demonstrate to the parish that the sick parishioners indeed minister to the faith community, since the community shares in the healing which Christ bestows through this sacrament. Such a celebration is also a fitting culmination of all the parish activities which reach out to the sick.

3. The Oil of the Sick

Ordinarily, the oil for anointing is that which was blessed by the bishop during Holy Week at the Chrism Mass. It is a symbol of blessing, of strength, of healing, and of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

- Additional supplies of the Oil of the Sick may always be obtained from the Office of Worship at the chancery.
- However, in case of necessity, the Rite for the Pastoral Care of the Sick permits the priest to bless olive oil or other vegetable oil during the celebration itself.¹⁶ The Rite calls for a generous use of the oil so it can be seen and felt as a genuine sign of the healing and strengthening presence of the Holy Spirit. For the same reason, the oil should not be wiped off after the anointing.¹⁷

C. Pastoral Care of the Dying

"The rites in Part II of Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum are used by the Church to comfort and strengthen a dying Catholic in the passage from this life. The ministry to the dying places emphasis on trust in the Lord's promise of eternal life rather than on the struggle against illness which is characteristic of the pastoral care of the sick."¹⁸

The ministry to the dying includes prayer, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Rite of Viaticum, and the pastoral visits. The priest should also urge the person to make a sincere confession. The four chapters of the rite treating pastoral care of the dying are:

Chapter 5: Celebration of Viaticum;
 Chapter 6: Commendation of the Dying;
 Chapter 7: Prayers for the Dead;
 Chapter 8: Rites for Exceptional Circumstances.

The needs of a dying person are contingent on how near death is perceived to be as well as the personality of the dying person.

- In addition, a dying person primarily needs the presence of others, especially family and friends, and compassion, which can be expressed in a variety of ways.
- At such a time, words cannot express what silent attentiveness, touch, and bodily presence can convey. Therefore, words must be chosen carefully and sparingly.
- Those ministering to the dying should aim, above all, to help the dying maintain a sense of hope in the love and mercy of Jesus. They should also allow the dying person to express feelings and emotions which may well up from within. They should be as comfortable as possible in discussing with the dying the spiritual and specifically Christian significance of their experience of dying.

1. Viaticum

Viaticum is food for the journey, the passage through death to eternal life. It celebrates the Paschal Mystery, the mystery of life, death and new life, both for the dying Christian and for the Christian community.

- In order to assure an atmosphere of serenity and peace so important to a dying person, the participation of the community will most likely be limited to a few people, especially the family and closest friends of the dying Christian.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be offered at some time prior to the reception of Viaticum.
- Viaticum is distinct from the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. It is the proper sacrament for a dying Christian; the Sacrament of Anointing is the proper sacrament for a Christian who is seriously ill. However, the priest should feel free to repeat the Sacrament of

Anointing together with the reception of Viaticum, especially if a long period of time has elapsed since the last anointing, and even more so if the person is dying from a more recent or different illness.

- One distinctive feature of the celebration of Viaticum is the Apostolic Blessing given by the priest either at the conclusion of the Sacrament of Reconciliation or at the conclusion of the penitential rite.
- A second distinctive feature is the renewal of baptismal promises. These draw the dying person into a fulfillment of his/her Christian initiation, especially with the reception of communion.
- The Sign of Peace, provides an opportunity for those present to embrace the dying person. The sense of leave-taking should not be denied during this time. It is a source of strength both for the dying and for those present, and can serve as a reminder of Christian hope that we will one day embrace each other again in heaven.
- The ordinary minister of viaticum is the priest. If no priest is available, Viaticum may be brought to the dying by a deacon or a lay pastoral care minister. 19 The deacon follows the rite prescribed in the ritual; a layperson follows the form of the rite from the Ritual for Laypersons.²⁰

2. Commendation of the Dying and Prayers for the Dead

Scripture offers many verses which console and strengthen the dying Christian. Scripture selections indicated in the ritual, as well as the prayers and litanies contained in the ritual, particularly are recommended.

- In the absence of a priest or deacon it is strongly recommended that a pastoral care minister or a family member lead in prayer those gathered around the dying person.
- The passages offered in the rite are best prayed slowly, quietly, and with periods of silence. The repetition of a single phrase or verse may be especially reassuring to a dying person. Scripture passages and the Litany of the Saints can be used for consolation and support. The rosary is an especially consoling prayer.
- After death occurs, the minister may trace a cross on the dead person's forehead and perhaps it would also be appropriate for the family to trace the cross on the forehead of the dead person.²¹ The prayers are for the deceased as well as for the consolation of those present, and are a reiteration of the promise of Resurrection.
- Even if a person who has died has already been absolved and anointed, the family rightfully expects pastoral care. If at all possible, this involves a visit by the priest, deacon, or pastoral care minister to the home or hospital to pray for the deceased, and to pray with the family and to console them. Prayers from the ritual are particularly recommended for such occasions.

3. Rites for Exceptional Circumstances

"The exceptional circumstances for which these rites are provided arise when there is a genuine necessity, for example, when sudden illness or an accident or some other cause has placed one of the faithful in the proximate or immediate danger of death." 22

- In these circumstances, the priest must offer the Sacrament of Reconciliation if the person is a Catholic, or absolution to the person if they are unconscious.
- In some circumstances, the person may request baptism or full communion with the Catholic Church. For these and other exceptional circumstances there are appropriate rites that

are to be followed.

- In using any of these rites, a priest must use pastoral judgment to discern the spiritual needs of the dying person, weighing the physical needs as medical personnel have advised. The abbreviated rites clearly are to be used only in emergencies, or when the situation or location are deemed inappropriate for the full rite.

1 The diocesan Pastoral Care Coordinating Committee and the Office of Worship regularly offer training for ministers to the sick and homebound.

2 Pastoral Care of the Sick, 74.

3 PCS, 75.

4 PCS, 97.

5 PCS, 108

6 Canon 844, §4.

7 PCS 7

8 Canons 998; 1004, §1; PCS, 8.

9 PCS, 10.

10 PCS, 11.

11 Canon 1005.

12 Canon 1004, §2.

13 These special prayers may also be offered by a deacon or lay pastoral care minister.

14 Canons 1004, 1005.

15 Canon 1006.

16 Canon 999.

17 PCS, 107.

18 PCS, 161.

19 PCS paragraph 19

20 Rites for Holy Communion and the Pastoral Care of the Sick and Dying. Liturgical Press, Collegeville, MN. In this diocese, this book is given to all Lay Leaders of Prayer as part of their formation.

21 PCS, 224.

22 PCS, 232.