

“Is anyone among you sick? They should call for the priests of the Church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.” [James 5:14-16]

The Church has the great challenge of continuing the work of Jesus’ healing in the world. Please know of the Church’s prayers for you and the one you love who is ill.


**THIS
INFORMATION IS
PROVIDED TO
YOU BY:**



*When to Call A
Priest When
Someone is in a
Nursing Home*

There are certain times in a Christian’s life when the presence of the Church is both comforting and healing. One of those times is when there is an illness which diminishes the life of the one who is ill, such that special care is needed from the family, physicians, friends, and staff of hospitals, nursing facilities and hospice.

This pastoral care should be provided by the local Catholic parish in which the sick person is registered throughout the period of his/her illness, not only when the person begins to be affected more deeply by the illness. The information given below is to help all caregivers have a better understanding of the Catholic Church’s desire to partner in providing consistent and grace-filled care for those who know well the suffering of Christ.





WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF THE SICK?

For many years the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was named *Extreme Unction* and referred to as the *last rites*. This happened for many reasons such as a high mortality rate and an emphasis being placed on cleansing the soul.

The *Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick* includes the opportunity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the rites of Anointing and of Viaticum. Viaticum is the final giving of Holy Communion to the sick person approaching death. The “last” Sacrament is Viaticum, which is the Holy Eucharist, administered in a special ritual. It is considered “food for the journey” when a person is at the time of passage from this life. Viaticum means *with us on the way*. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is for those who are seriously ill; Viaticum, the Eucharist, is the Sacrament for the dying.

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick occurs when a Catholic priest prays over, lays hands on and anoints the sick person on the forehead and hands with the Oil of the Sick. The Oil of the Sick is special holy oil blessed by the Bishop once a year as part of the Chrism Mass held on or around Holy Thursday. Each Catholic parish receives some of this blessed oil for use in the Rite of Anointing.

WHO CAN ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK? CAN A DEACON OR LAY PERSON DO THIS?

The only minister of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the sick is a bishop or a priest. However, all Christians are called to pray for, visit and show compassion to the sick.

WHEN SHOULD I CALL A PRIEST? WHICH PRIEST SHOULD I CALL?

The parish priest of the person who is ill should be informed as soon as serious illness befalls a sick person- or when serious surgery is scheduled- so that the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can be administered, along with the Sacrament of Reconciliation, if possible. Pastoral care for the sick person should be asked for as soon as a person experiences the danger of illness or is chronically ill, particularly if the person is elderly. During the course of the illness, Holy Communion should be offered to the sick person as often as it is conveniently distributed by the Ministers of Holy Communion that service the nursing home. In nursing home facilities, where the patients come from many different Catholic parishes, the clergy and lay ministers who provide the ordinary pastoral care at the facility should be informed of the person's condition. These are the persons who usually schedule prayer services and coordinate Eucharistic ministry.

When death is imminent, if the sick person is in a nursing home facility that has a deacon or priest assigned to provide Catholic pastoral care, [but if at all possible while the sick person is still conscious], the pastoral care staff of the nursing home facility should be notified first so that Viaticum [Holy Communion for the Dying] can be administered by the local deacon, priest, chaplain or minister of Holy Communion. If the dying person is in a nursing home facility that does not provide such Catholic pastoral care or dying at home, the dying person's local catholic parish pastor or the pastor of the parish where the nursing home resides should be contacted to provide pastoral care for the dying. Once death occurs, notice should be given to the deceased person's Catholic parish office so that the ritual prayers for the dead can be offered and that arrangement for funeral services can begin.

Funeral arrangements should begin with contact with the deceased person's local parish office. No funeral arrangements should be finalized without this contact having first been made.

WHAT DOES BEING “SICK” MEAN? HOW SERIOUSLY ILL DOES A PERSON HAVE TO BE TO RECEIVE THIS SACRAMENT?

Any person who is seriously ill because of sickness, old age or injury may be anointed. The illness may be physical or mental. The ritual indicates that a person who is ill should be anointed early in the illness, or before one faces serious surgery. The anointing can be repeated if the medical situation worsens or if the sick person experiences a different illness or injury. However, it is not necessary to repeatedly anoint a person who is ill. God's compassion and faithfulness remain with the sick person throughout his/her illness.

WHAT IF THE SICK PERSON IS UNCONSCIOUS?

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can be administered to a person who is not conscious. In this case, the Church relies on the desire of the family who requests this and on the presumption that the ill person would have asked for the anointing if s/he were able to do so.

SHOULD SOMEONE RECEIVE THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK AFTER DEATH?

Since all the Sacraments of the Church are an encounter between a living person and God within the Church community, anointing a person who is certainly dead is not possible. The ritual, however, provides official prayers for the dead and the consolation of the living as part of the Church's pastoral care.

