



**PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK
RITES OF ANOINTING AND VIATICUM**
Diocese of Great Falls-Billings

I. Basic background:

In the decree promulgating the rite, *Pastoral Care of the Sick; Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, we read:

When the Church cares for the sick, it serves Christ himself in the suffering members of his Mystical Body. When it follows the example of the Lord Jesus, who “went about doing good and healing all” (Acts 10:38), the Church obeys his command to care for the sick (see Mark 16:18). 7 December 1972

From the earliest days the church has taken seriously the words of St. James, “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).

The history of the anointing and its meaning details changes and additions in the formulae and explicit definitions of the parts of the body to be anointed. It came to be associated especially with those who were in imminent danger of death and was referred to as “Extreme Unction” the “last anointing”.

Vatican II stated “‘Extreme Unction’, which may also and more properly be called ‘Anointing of the Sick,’ is not a sacrament intended only for those who are at the point of death. Hence, it is certain that as soon as any of the faithful begins to be in danger of death from sickness or old age, this is already a suitable time for them to receive this sacrament” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #73).

Today in the post-Vatican II rite we note a change in the emphasis of anointing. It renews the teaching on the anointing of the sick – not the dying - and is celebrated in hopes that health may be restored to the soul and even to the body when one is ill and in danger of death (not necessarily imminent). The sacrament may be given with a reasonably sure judgment on the seriousness of the illness. It may be repeated if a person recovers and again falls ill, or in the same illness the condition becomes worse (adapted from *General Introduction*, #8). It may even be given if there is a doubt as to whether or not death has taken place.

The sacrament is a sacrament of the living which means that the person must be in the state of grace to validly receive it. We look for the person to request the sacrament, if they are physically able to do so, and we encourage their participation in the prayers and ritual actions. It is a gift to them if the family invites them to consider the celebration



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of the sacrament while they are still able to participate in its celebration with some understanding.

When a priest has been called to attend those who are already dead, he should not administer the sacrament of anointing. Instead, he should pray for them, asking that God forgive their sins and graciously receive them into the kingdom. But if the priest is doubtful whether the sick person is dead, he should confer the sacrament, using the rite given in no. 269 (*General Introduction*, # 15).

The renewal also directed a return to the ancient understanding of Viaticum (Holy Communion) as the “Last Sacrament”. Here it is that we give the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ to be with the dying on their journey to new life.

When in their passage from this life Christians are strengthened by the body and blood of Christ in Viaticum, they have the pledge of the resurrection that the Lord promised: “Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day” (John 6:54) (General Introduction #26).

The ordinary ministers of viaticum are the parish priest (pastor) and parochial vicars, chaplains, and, for all staying in the house, the superior in clerical religious institutes or societies of apostolic life. In case of necessity or with at least the presumed permission of the competent minister, any priest or deacon may give Viaticum, or if no ordained minister is available, any member of the faithful who has been duly appointed (General Introduction #29).

II. Canonical requirements:

Canon 998 -- *The anointing of the sick, by which the Church commends the faithful who are dangerously ill to the suffering and glorified Lord in order that he relieve and save them, is conferred by anointing them with oil and pronouncing the words prescribed in the liturgical books.*

Canon 999 -- *In addition to the bishop, the following can bless the oil to be used in the anointing of the sick:*

- 1° *those equivalent to a diocesan bishop by law;*
- 2° *any presbyter in a case of necessity, but only in the actual celebration of the sacrament.*



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Canon 1000 --

- §1. *The anointings with the words, order, and manner prescribed in the liturgical books are to be performed carefully. In a case of necessity, however, a single anointing on the forehead or even on some other part of the body is sufficient while the entire formula is said.*
- §2. *The minister is to perform the anointings with his own hand, unless a grave reason warrants the use of an instrument.*

Canon 1001 -- *Pastors of souls and those close to the sick are to take care that the sick are consoled by this sacrament at the appropriate time.*

Canon 1002 -- *The communal celebration of the anointing of the sick for many of the sick at once, who have been suitably prepared, can be performed according to the prescripts of the diocesan bishop.*

Canon 1003 --

- §1. *“Every priest and a priest alone validly administers the anointing of the sick.”*
- §2. *All priests to whom the care of souls has been entrusted have the duty and right of administering the anointing of the sick for the faithful entrusted to their pastoral office. For a reasonable cause, any other priest can administer this sacrament with at least the presumed consent of the priest mentioned above.*
- §3. *Any priest is permitted to carry blessed oil with him so that he is able to administer the sacrament of the anointing of the sick in a case of necessity.*

Canon 1004 --

- §1. *The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age.*
- §2. *This sacrament can be repeated if the sick person, having recovered, again becomes gravely ill or if the condition becomes more grave during the same illness.*

Canon 1005 -- *This sacrament is to be administered in case of doubt whether the sick person attained the use of reason, is dangerously ill, or is dead.*

Canon 1006 -- *This sacrament is to be conferred on the sick who at least implicitly requested it when they were in control of their faculties.*

Canon 1007 -- *The anointing of the sick is not to be conferred upon those who persevere obstinately in manifest grave sin.*



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III. Catechetical guidelines:

A. Remote preparation:

It is important that all the faithful, and above all the sick, be aided by suitable catechesis in preparing for and participating in the sacraments of anointing and viaticum, especially if the celebration is to be carried out communally. In this way they will understand more fully what has been said about the anointing of the sick and about viaticum, and the celebration of these sacraments will nourish, strengthen, and manifest faith more effectively. For the prayer of faith which accompanies the celebration of the sacrament is nourished by the profession of this faith (*Pastoral Care of the Sick #36*).

1. Priests/Deacons

The best of all preparations is that the ministers study the introductions by reading through them reflectively a few times. There is much fine material in these sections addressing both the theological and pastoral approach of which one needs to be aware. After that study, go to the rites given for each situation. Having a solid remote understanding of the different possible situations and rites enables the minister to find the specific rite, and gives one the necessary background information to make good pastoral judgments and adaptations when needed.

Part I deals with the pastoral care of the Sick:

Introduction

Chapter one, Visits To The Sick

Chapter two, Visits To A Sick Child

Chapter three, Communion Of The Sick

Chapter four, Anointing Of The Sick

Part II deals with the pastoral care of The Dying:

Chapter five, The Celebration Of Viaticum (within and outside of mass),

Chapter six, Commendation Of The Dying,

Chapter seven, Prayers For The Dead.

Chapter eight, Rites For Exceptional Circumstances

A Continuous Rite Of Penance, Anointing and Viaticum

A Rite For Emergencies

Christian Initiation For The Dying

The appendix contains A Rite For Reconciliation Of Individual Penitents

2. Lay Ministers

The pastor, liturgy coordinator or whoever is in charge of the ministers must be fully aware of the correct practices and be intentional about preparing the ministers for their ministry to the sick. They must be aware that in cases of necessity the ministers may also administer Viaticum to the dying if the priest or deacon is not available. (*General Introduction #29.2*)



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A number of publishers have separated the rites for visiting the sick and for bringing them communion. These small booklets are available for a minimum price and could be given to each of the lay ministers at the parish who visit the sick and/or take communion to them at home, in the hospital or in nursing homes.

3. The assembly

In public and private catechesis, the faithful should be educated to ask for the sacrament of anointing and, as soon as the right time comes, to receive it with full faith and devotion. They should not follow the wrongful practice of delaying the reception of the sacrament. All who care for the sick should be taught the meaning and purpose of the sacrament (*Pastoral Care of the Sick #13*).

Periodic articles in the parish newsletter or bulletin regarding the value and importance of our sacramental life are a good means of education. Pamphlets such as Our Sunday Visitor Updates provide fine background material on most of the sacraments and could be inserted in the bulletin or left in the rack. Adult formation and/or discussion groups could periodically address the topic of the sacraments in their sessions.

A. Immediate preparation:

Before communal celebrations of Anointing of the Sick, the bulletin needs to carry some instructions regarding the reception of the sacrament, its theological and sacramental meaning, the value of our participation in its celebration, and the requirements for a valid reception of the sacrament.

The parish liturgy committee, social justice committee and parish nurse (if applicable) need to work together to facilitate a celebration that is meaningful, respectful of the persons being anointed and a communal support for all involved. The space needs to be barrier free and easily accessible. Attention to the lighting and the sound needs to be paid so that the people are able to adequately see what is happening and to read the items in the booklets or participation aids. The ability to hear the presider, the lector and any other minister is extremely important if the celebration is to be meaningful to those among us who are ill and there to celebrate the anointing.

Details for the celebration include:

- Planning the liturgical celebration (addressed below)
- The logistics of providing transportation to the church (especially for those without family to assist them)
- The welcoming and assistance of persons to be anointed to their place in the assembly



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- The convenient seating of sacramental recipients so as to make their participation easy (perhaps an empty row between each row of persons so the priest may move along in front of each person to be anointed if they are unable to come forward easily)
- Possible reception to follow the liturgy, giving an opportunity for parishioners to reach out in a social setting to those who may not always be present at parish functions

IV Liturgical guidelines:

A. ANOINTING, COMMUNAL AND INDIVIDUAL:

One note on this topic is that in the English-language editions of the ritual a pastoral note was added: "In particular, the practice of indiscriminately anointing large numbers of persons on these occasions simply because they are ill or have reached an advanced age is to be avoided. Only those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age are proper subjects for the sacrament" (*New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, Paulist Press, 2000, p. 1185). The Diocese of Great Falls-Billings directs that there is not to be indiscriminate anointing.

The intent of the above is for larger groups such as all those in a nursing home, or the home bound and sick persons from the parish. This anointing may be celebrated either within Mass (in the home, nursing home or parish setting) or outside of Mass. The communal celebration of the Anointing of the Sick at a parish Mass is greatly encouraged. It may take place a few times a year and provides a setting wherein the total community can come together to support those who are ill, their families and caregivers. It is also an opportunity for the community to understand the true meaning of anointing wherein we pray for the healing of body, mind and spirit and the return to health of the person if that be God's will. The notes above in immediate preparation give some ideas for planning and preparing for these celebrations. It is important to include many of the parish ministries in this planning and in the celebration.

In planning celebrations with an individual it is most important to consider the condition of the person so that the readings and prayers are not excessive for them. It is also important that we invite members of the family and/or caregivers to be present so that the celebration represents the care and love of the community and the power of community prayer. Health care or hospice workers, or a parish nurse would be able to suggest what may be too much activity for the person and when to scale back on the amount and length of prayer we plan.



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The following outline covers the celebration of Anointing either within or outside of Mass. For the structure of other celebrations (in emergencies, special situations, etc.) please refer to the Rite.

It is important to note that neither a deacon nor a pastoral minister may validly anoint. They may, in fact are encouraged, to minister to the sick, pray with them and give Viaticum to the dying when no priest is available. Often they may be the ones to suggest that it is time to celebrate the sacrament of the Anointing.

Regarding the matter and form of the sacrament, the canons are helpful. The usual person to bless the Oil of the Sick is the bishop who does it during the Chrism Mass. The Church, however, allows for other blessings in case of emergency or necessity. Allowance is also made for those cases where it is not possible or appropriate to include all the words and anointing, or even the place of the anointing.

Revised & Promulgated
By Bishop Michael W. Warfel
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Anointing of the Sick
Within Mass

INTRODUCTORY RITES:	Number of Options Given in the Ritual
Greeting	
Reception of The Sick	(2)
Penitential rite	(3)
Opening prayer	(2)
LITURGY OF THE WORD:	Scripture Selections:
Hebrew Testament	(9)
Acts	(4)
New Testament	(19)
Responsorial Psalm	(14)
Gospel Acclamation	(7)
Gospel	(20)
LITURGY OF ANOINTING:	
Litany of Intercession (may be transferred to follow the anointing)	(3)
Imposition of Hands – in silence	
Prayer over the oil	
Blessing of the oil if needed OR	
Thanksgiving prayer	
Anointing on forehead and hands	
Prayer after anointing (adapted to condition of person)	(7)
LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST: (as in the Order of Mass with exceptions noted)	
Prayer over the Gifts	(2)
Special Preface	
Special intercessions (embolisms) for Eucharistic Prayers I, II, III	
Prayer after communion	(2)
CONCLUDING RITE:	
Blessing	(3)
Dismissal	

N.B. The ritual Mass for the Anointing of The Sick is not permitted during the Easter Triduum, on the Solemnities of Christmas, Epiphany, Ascension, Pentecost, Corpus Christi, or on a solemnity which is a holy day of obligation. On these occasions the texts and readings are taken from the Mass of the day. Although the ritual Mass is also excluded on the Sundays of Advent, Lent, and the Easter Season, on solemnities, Ash Wednesday and the weekdays of Holy Week, one of the readings may be taken from the Scripture texts indicated above and the special form of the final blessing may be used (#134.b).



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Anointing of the Sick
Outside of Mass

	Number of Options Given in the Ritual
INTRODUCTORY RITES:	
Greeting	(4)
Sprinkling - reminder of baptism	(3)
Opening words or prayer	
Penitential rite (used if not celebrating Rite of Penance)	(4)
LITURGY OF THE WORD:	Scripture Selections:
Hebrew Testament	(9)
Acts	(4)
New Testament	(19)
Responsorial Psalm	(14)
Gospel Acclamation	(7)
Gospel	(20)
LITURGY OF ANOINTING:	
Litany of Intercession (may be transferred to follow the anointing)	(3)
Imposition of Hands – in silence	
Prayer over the oil Blessing of the oil if needed OR Thanksgiving prayer	
Anointing on forehead and hands	
Prayer after anointing (adapted to condition of person)	(7)
Lord's Prayer	
CONCLUDING RITE:	
OR	
LITURGY OF HOLY COMMUNION	
Showing of the Blessed Sacrament with prayer	(3)
Reception of communion	
Silent prayer	
Prayer after communion	(3)
Blessing:	



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B. CARE OF AND COMMUNION TO THE SICK

The following outlines the structure used when taking communion to a sick person. Pastoral decisions must be made in terms of the condition of the person(s) and the place of celebration. A parish nurse may have helpful insights here. The priest, deacon or minister must come prepared with the items needed, or have arranged beforehand that they be ready at the site of celebration. Respect for the person who is ill, the sacrament to be celebrated and the others involved require paying attention to the particular situation and the surroundings. Putting people at ease and inviting them into an attitude of prayer is important before the celebration.

Communion to the Sick

Ordinary Rite

(Within a Liturgy of the Word)

Introductory Rites

Greeting

Sprinkling rite (optional)

Penitential Rite (if Penance not celebrated)

Liturgy of the Word

Reading

Response

General Intercessions

Liturgy of Holy Communion

Lord's Prayer

"This is the Lamb..."
(Elevating the Host)

Reception of Communion

Prayer after Communion

Concluding Rite

Blessing

Short Rite

In an Institution

(In restrictive circumstances- hospital room)

Introductory Rite

Antipon (in hospital chapel or first room)

Communion Rite:(In each room)

Greeting

Lord's Prayer

"This is the Lamb..."
(Elevating the Host)

Reception of Communion

Prayer