

**DIOCESE OF GALLUP  
SACRAMENTAL GUIDELINES  
ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

**A. MEANING OF THE SACRAMENT**

"The Lord himself showed great concern for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the sick and commanded his followers to do likewise. This is clear from the gospels, and above all from the existence of the sacrament of anointing, which he instituted and which is made known in the letter of James. Since then the Church has never ceased to celebrate this sacrament for its members by the anointing and the prayer of its priests, commending



those who are ill to the suffering and glorified Lord, that he may raise them up and save them (James 5: 14-16). Moreover, the Church exhorts them to associate themselves willingly with the passion and death of Christ (Romans 8:17), and thus contribute to the welfare of the people of God.

Those who are seriously ill need the special help of God's grace in this time of anxiety, lest they be broken in spirit and under the pressure of temptation perhaps weakened in their faith.

This is why, through the sacrament of anointing, Christ strengthens the faithful who are ~ afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support " (PCS #5)

**B. THE COMMUNITY**

The caring community is the underlying foundation of the sacrament, without which it cannot speak effectively. Our God is a God who became flesh in Jesus Christ. He willed that his care and concern should become incarnate in the flesh and blood of people who believed in him. All who contributed in any way to the health and well-being and comfort of the sick and elderly are an integral part of the sacramental care of the Church. The fostering of a caring community is a primary concern if the sacrament of anointing is to be intelligible.

**C. EUCHARIST**

All sacraments flow from and lead to the Eucharist. In the Eucharist is found the central memorial of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. In the Eucharist is found the

chief healing and reconciling expression of the Church. The Church provides for celebrating the anointing of the sick within the context of the Mass. Likewise the Church provides for frequent communion to the sick, linking them with the Christian community and with Christ. And when Christians are called to seal their baptism by death, the Church nourishes them with the Viaticum for their final journey. There is no greater gift that the Christian community can share, in the context of care for the sick and dying, than to break with them the bread that is Christ. In this action is summed up all of the ministry of Christ and of the Church.

#### D. CATECHESIS

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. They should be encouraged to ask for the sacrament of anointing in the early stages of illness and not delay the reception of the sacrament. All who care for the sick should be taught the meaning and purpose of the sacrament.

#### E. RECIPIENTS OF THE SACRAMENT

The anointing of the sick can be administered to a member of the faithful who, after having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger due to sickness or old age. The sacrament can be repeated whenever the sick person again falls into a serious sickness after convalescence or whenever a more serious crisis develops during the same sickness.

The sacrament of anointing is to be administered when there is a doubt whether the sick person has attained the use of reason, whether the person is dangerously ill, or whether the person is dead.

The sacrament of anointing is to be conferred upon sick person who requested it at least implicitly when they were in control of their faculties. The anointing is not to be conferred upon those who obstinately persist in manifesting serious sin.

#### F. MINISTERS OF THE SACRAMENT

The minister of the sacrament comes as one who is called to sum up and complete the care and concern of the Christian community for those who are sick or in their declining years. He represents the care and concern of Christ extended through the ages in the Church. He, too, must be a human being who can respond with faith and feeling to the condition of sickness and age. This is no easy task, and impossible without the power of Christ and the example of caring Christians to support him. But it is the vocation of one who is called to take upon himself, as Christ did, "The joys and hopes, the grieves and the anxieties of the

people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (Church in the Modern World, #1).

Bishops and priests are the proper ministers of the anointing of the sick (pCS #16).

The ordinary minister is the parish priest, a priest chaplain, or the superior of a clerical religious institute or society of apostolic life. Other priests may confer the anointing with the consent of the above. In case of necessity, any priest may anoint, but he should later inform the pastor or chaplain (pCS #18).

## G. THE RITE

The celebration of the sacrament consists especially in the laying on of hands by the priest of the Church, the offering of the prayer of faith, and the anointing of the sick with oil made holy by God's blessing (pCS #5).

The oil used for the anointing is to be olive oil, or according to circumstances, other plant oil. It is the oil that is blessed by the bishop at the Mass of Chrism. In case of true necessity, any priest may bless the oil within the celebration of the sacrament (pCS #20, 21).

There should be sufficient oil so that it can be applied liberally. It may be appropriately scented. It should be in an appropriate container. The oil should not be wiped off after the anointing (pCS #22).

The priest should follow the structure of the rite in the celebration, while accommodating it to the place and the people involved (pCS #4 I). Mindful of the condition of the sick people, he may shorten the rite (pCS #40).

The sick person is anointed on the forehead and on the hands. It is appropriate to divide the sacramental form so that the first part is said while the forehead is anointed; the latter part while the hands are anointed (pCS #23).

The following is the sacramental form with which the anointing of the sick is given:

Through this holy anointing

may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.

May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.

In case of necessity, it is sufficient that a single anointing be given on the forehead or, because of the condition of the sick person, on another suitable part of the body, while the whole sacramental form is said (pCS #23).

## H. COMMUNAL CELEBRATIONS

A communal celebration of the sacrament is to be preferred whenever possible even when only one person is to be anointed. The family and friends of the one to be anointed should be invited to share in the celebration.

Communal celebration of anointing of the sick should be held regularly in parishes, convalescent and nursing homes, and in hospitals. The frequency of such celebrations is to be determined by the needs of the people.

Local circumstances permitting, a celebration within Mass is to be preferred.

## L. VIATICUM FOR THE DYING

The celebration of the Eucharist as Viaticum is the sacrament proper to the dying Christian. When possible, Viaticum should be received within Mass so that the sick person may receive Communion under both kinds. Communion received as Viaticum should be considered a special sign of participation in the mystery which is celebrated in the Eucharist: the mystery of the death of the Lord and his passage to the Father (pCS #26).

All baptized Christians who are able to receive Communion are bound to receive Viaticum by reason of the precept to receive Communion when in danger of death from any cause. Priests with pastoral responsibility must see that the celebration is not delayed; but that the faithful are nourished by it while still in full possession of their faculties (pCS #27).

The ordinary ministers of Viaticum are the parish priests, priest chaplains, the Superior of a clerical religious institute or society of apostolic life. In case of necessity, any other priest with at least the presumed permission of the ordinary minister may give Viaticum (pCS #29).

If no priest is available, Viaticum may be brought to the sick by a deacon or another member of the faithful, who has been duly appointed to give the Eucharist to the faithful. In this case a deacon follows the rite prescribed by the ritual; other ministers use the rite for the distribution of communion, but with the special word given in the ritual for the Viaticum (pCS #29).

Priests and other ministers entrusted with the spiritual care of the sick should do everything they can to ensure that those in proximate danger of death receive the Body and Blood of Christ as Viaticum.

## J. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Those responsible for the care of the sick and the dying should be familiar with the various rites to be used in exceptional circumstances. These can be found in Chapter Eight of PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK, RITE OF ANOINTING AND VIATICUM. Included are a "Continuous Rite of Penance, Anointing and Viaticum", a "Rite for Emergencies" to be used when death seems imminent and "Christian Initiation for the Dying" to be used when ministering to an uninitiated or partially initiated person.

## K. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. May a person with a serious mental illness be anointed? The sacrament of anointing can be administered to those who have a serious mental illness and who can be comforted by the sacrament (pCS #53). Many psychological illnesses are indeed serious, especially those classified as psychoses. However, the minister should exercise caution before anointing persons with serious mental illnesses. Such cases should always be handled on an individual basis in consultation with the person's physician.

2. May a person who is developmentally disabled be anointed? Developmentally disabled persons who lack the full use of reason, such as the mentally retarded, can be anointed if they can be comforted by the sacrament. They do not need to have an intellectual understanding of the sacrament or the ability to express their faith rationally; they only need the capacity to be strengthened by the celebration. Mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, however are not illnesses but rather permanent conditions of persons. Persons with sick conditions must have a serious illness to be anointed.

3. May a person who is elderly and/or handicapped be anointed? The elderly, those suffering from the maladies of old age, usually those 65 years of age and older, may periodically receive the sacrament of anointing. Likewise, those who are chronically ill and those who are permanently disabled are appropriate candidates for the sacrament of anointing.

4. How frequently should communal services of anointing be made available in the various parishes and appropriate agencies and with what frequency may the faithful receive the sacrament of anointing?

It is recommended that once every three months a communal service of anointing should be made available to the faithful who are appropriate candidates for the sacrament. Likewise, those who suffer from chronic or terminal conditions may receive this sacrament quarterly. In the event that a medical emergency occurs or a person's chronic condition worsens the sacrament may also be received at that time.

5. .At a communal anointing service, may a general invitation be extended to all present to come forward to be anointed?

No. According to the Church's law (cc. 988, 1004.1) and in the rite for the pastoral care of the sick (8), the sacrament may be administered only to those who are seriously ill, specifically those who begin to be in danger due to sickness or old age. This includes those about to undergo surgery when a serious illness the reason for the surgery (PCS #10).

6. May someone other than a priest anoint the sick?

The practice of lay persons anointing the sick has been encouraged by some prayer groups and retreat houses. There is serious danger of simulating the sacrament in such instances. Everything should be done to discourage a practice that leads to confusion in the minds of people. Under no circumstances is it appropriate to give out to people any of the oils which have been blessed at the Mass of Chrism. These should be kept only for the sacrament administered by a priest.

7. What office should be contacted with questions?

General questions should be addressed to the Chancery Office.