

## Prayers Of Commendation

The dying person may be assisted on the journey through death to eternal life with the Church's prayer. A pastoral care minister (priest, deacon or lay person) may be called to be present at this time. Short prayers, brief Scripture readings and prayers of commendation (commending the dying to God) may be provided.

### WHEN A PERSON HAS DIED

When a death occurs (whether anticipated or unexpected), it is fitting to contact your parish (priest or lay pastoral minister) or the on-call hospital spiritual care provider immediately. The dead may not be Anointed, but at this time the Church provides prayers for the deceased and the family and friends.

### SOME SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCE

#### Infants

When an infant is in danger of death, a priest or other pastoral care minister should be called to celebrate the Sacrament of Baptism. When such ministers are unavailable, any person may baptize the child provided they baptize with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and have the intention of the Church with regard to Baptism. When a child is stillborn, prayers of commendation are said for the child and prayers of consolation are offered for the parents and family.

#### Suicide

When a person has died as a result of suicide, the parish priest or lay pastoral minister or the on-call hospital spiritual care provider should be contacted immediately. On this occasion the Church provides prayers of commendation and prayers for the deceased and the family and friends.

### WHEN A PRIEST IS NOT AVAILABLE

Occasionally a priest may not be available for an emergency. In such a case, other ministers of the Church or hospital should be contacted. By offering the Church's prayer for the sick and dying or celebrating the rites of commendation for the dead, they can bring comfort and strength to the sick and consolation to the bereaved.



For more information,  
contact your parish  
or the coordinator of pastoral care  
of your local hospital.

# The Catholic Church's Pastoral Care to the Sick and Dying



“Through this holy anointing  
may the Lord, in His love and mercy,  
help you with grace of the Holy Spirit”

*Ritual of Anointing*

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus loved the sick. He visited, forgave and healed them. Recognizing Christ in our brothers and sisters, the Church continues his saving work and care for the sick in our midst. We remember the sick in the Liturgy of the Hours (the daily prayer of the Church), at Mass during the Prayer of the Faithful, by bringing them Communion, and by special blessings and prayers, particularly the Sacrament of Anointing.

Through Holy Anointing, the Church commends the sick to the glorified Lord who suffered for us, so that he may save them and raise them up. The sick contribute to the welfare of the whole People of God by their witness to Divine Providence still at work in their lives and by associating themselves with the suffering and death of the Lord Jesus.

Within the Roman Catholic community, ministry to the sick and dying is greatly valued. Through prayer, pastoral visits to the sick, the celebration of the sacraments which may only be celebrated with the living, and the commendation of the dead, the Church's ministers (ordained and lay) continue the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ.

Over the past fifty years, the Catholic Church has reformed its liturgical rites so that they correspond more closely to the circumstances in which they are celebrated and reveal more clearly the healing and life-giving action of Christ. When families are faced with serious illness and death, they fittingly turn to the Church and its ministers for a sign of Christ's presence in the midst of their pain or grief. Sometimes, they are unsure how to approach the Church or what to ask for on these occasions. This pamphlet provides information regarding the Church's pastoral care of the sick and dying.

## WHEN SOMEONE IS SERIOUSLY ILL

### Contact your parish immediately

When someone in your family or a parishioner is seriously sick or confined to home for a period of time, contact your parish immediately. Let your parish know of the person's illness. Depending on the circumstances, a priest or lay minister may be available to visit, pray with the sick person and perhaps bring Communion. A priest may also celebrate the Sacrament of the Sick (Anointing) with the sick person. In every case, the parish community can support the sick person with prayer.

When someone becomes seriously sick, it is important to contact the parish immediately; don't wait until the person is unconscious or nearing death!

### Communion

The reception of Communion unites the sick person with Christ and the members of Christ's body, the Church. Unless medical personnel have indicated that there are dietary restrictions, the Eucharist may be brought to the sick by a priest, deacon or lay minister. Sometimes a family member may be delegated by the pastor to do this. In some parishes a minister may bring the Eucharist on a weekly basis.

### Anointing of the Sick

When a person is seriously ill, it is appropriate to celebrate the Sacrament of the Sick (Anointing). Formerly, this sacrament was called "extreme unction" and was most often celebrated when a person was near death. Today this sacrament is celebrated with those who are seriously sick, people who are diagnosed with life-threatening illness, patients before surgery, elderly people who are very weak, and sick children old enough to be comforted by the sacrament. The Anointing of the Sick is no longer regarded as the "last rites." It is celebrated only with the living and may be celebrated several times, especially if the person's health gets worse. This wonderful

sacrament is ideally celebrated when the sick person is conscious; where possible, family members ought to be present to participate in this celebration of the Church.

### Reconciliation

Those who are sick and would like to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance or Confession) are asked to make arrangements with their parish priests to do so. When a person has been away from the practice of the faith, the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be celebrated prior to the reception of Communion. When a sick person desires to be reconciled to the Church and to experience God's mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a priest should be notified. Arrangements can then be made for the sick person to celebrate this sacrament in conjunction with a pastoral visit or with the reception of the Eucharist and Anointing of the Sick.

## WHEN A PERSON IS DYING

### Anointing of the Sick

When a person is dying a priest may be called to celebrate the Sacrament of the Sick, especially if the sick person has not recently received the sacrament. When the Anointing of the Sick is celebrated on this occasion, the sick person receives the grace of the Holy Spirit, is strengthened against evil and prepared for eternal life. Only those who are alive may be anointed.

### Viaticum

Whenever possible, the "last rite" that is celebrated with a Catholic Christian before death is Viaticum (Final Communion). In this sacrament, the dying person receives the Eucharist as food for the passage through death to eternal life. Any Catholic lay or ordained minister may minister Viaticum. The sick person needs to be conscious and able to swallow to receive the sacrament.