

## 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, 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, and the commendation of the dead, the Church's ministers (ordained and lay) continue the compassionate ministry of Jesus Christ.

Over the past forty 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 today.

## WHEN SOMEONE IS SERIOUSLY ILL

### **Contact your parish immediately**

When someone in your family or a friend 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 is 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 of the Sick). Formerly, this sacrament was called "extreme unction" and was most often celebrated when a person was near death. However, 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**

When a person has been away from the practice of the faith, the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Penance) 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 should be called to celebrate the Sacrament of the Sick. 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.

### **Viaticum**

Whenever possible, the "last rite" that is celebrated with a Catholic Christian before death is Viaticum. In this sacrament, the dying person receives the Eucharist as food for the passage through death to eternal life.

### **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 may be provided.

### **WHEN A PERSON HAS DIED**

When a death occurs (whether anticipated or unexpected) it is fitting to contact your parish (or the priest or pastoral minister on call at the hospital) immediately. At this time the Church provides prayers of commendation, and prayer for the deceased and the family and friends.

### **SOME SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES**

#### **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 pastoral minister on call at the hospital should be contacted immediately. On this occasion the Church provides prayers of commendation, and prayer 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 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 priest  
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 the grace of the  
Holy Spirit”***

*Ritual of Anointing*