

## VI. CELEBRATION OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

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*Pastoral practice regulating the sacramental celebration of the anointing of the sick must follow the teaching and discipline of the Church as articulated in PASTORAL CARE OF THE SICK: RITES OF ANOINTING AND VIATICUM and the revised CODE OF CANON LAW (#998-1007).*

#### **A. LITURGICAL CATECHESIS**

1. Prior to the revised rite, the ministry to the dying was pastorally and liturgically emphasized. The “last rites” or “extreme unction” (Penance, Anointing, Viaticum - administered near the time of death) were considered an extremely important part of the priest’s ministry to his people. But this preoccupation with the administration of the sacraments at the time of death had the effect of devaluating the normal liturgical ministry to the sick. The office for the visitation of the sick was rarely, if ever, used and the rite for the bringing of holy communion to the sick had been reduced to its bare essentials.
2. The name has been changed in order to better explaining the meaning and value of the sacrament; especially that is not only meant for the dying.
3. The prayers of the rite have been revised to correspond to the varying conditions of the sick and the number of rituals of anointing have been adapted so as to meet various needs. They restore a proper balance between the pastoral ministry to the sick and the pastoral ministry to the dying.
  - a. The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is now placed within the rites of the visitation and communion to the sick as part of the Church’s ordinary ministry to the sick.
  - b. Viaticum is rightfully restored to its proper place as the sacrament of the dying and normally is to be celebrated in a rite separate from the Anointing of the Sick.
  - c. A continuous rite for celebrating the sacraments of Reconciliation, Anointing and Viaticum is provided in the *RITE OF ANOINTING* for use in circumstances where the three sacraments are to be celebrated at the same time. The ritual makes it very clear that the continuous rite is to be used only in cases of necessity and is not to be the ordinary practice. Each sacrament is to be celebrated at the proper time, and their reception is not be delayed until the last moment.
  - d. The Rite of Anointing also includes the Rite of Confirmation in danger of death and the Rite for Commendation of the Dying. The latter rite, although it is directed toward the dying person, is a means of providing consolation to the family and friends of the dying person.

4. Sacraments are for the living, not the dead. The time to request the sacrament of Anointing is when a person BEGINS to be in serious danger from sickness or old age. After death, pastoral ministers comfort the grieving as together they pray for the deceased.
5. A person may be anointed a number of times during the course of an illness, especially if the illness is prolonged. The sacrament can be repeated whenever the sick person again falls into serious sickness after convalescence or whenever a more serious crisis develops during the same illness (CCL, #1004§2)

## **B. RECIPIENT OF THE SACRAMENT**

The basic requirements for the valid celebration are two:

- the recipient must be baptized;
- the recipient may not obstinately persist in serious, public sin (Canon 998 & 1007).

Anointing is reserved for critical moments at the onset and during the progression of a serious illness or a notable weakening in the condition of an elderly person.

### **1. THE ELDERLY**

Elderly people may be anointed if they have become notably weakened. It is canonically illicit to suggest that all persons be anointed simply because they have reached a certain age.

### **2. CANDIDATES FOR SURGERY**

Sick persons are to be anointed before surgery whenever a serious illness is the reason for the surgery (PCS, #10).

### **3. CHILDREN**

“Sick children are to be anointed if they have sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by this sacrament. In case of doubt whether the child has reached the use of reason, the sacrament is to be conferred” (PCS, #12). If the sick child has not reached the age of reason, the blessings given in *Pastoral Care of the Sick* for a “Visit to a Sick Child” may be used (see PCS, #62-70)

### **4. MENTAL ILLNESS**

The sacrament may be celebrated with those who have a serious mental illness and who can be comforted by the sacrament (PCS, #53). Mental illness can be as severe as physical illness and as equally draining of a person’s strength and energy.

### **5. PERSONS IN CRISIS**

Those in crisis situations such as those suffering greatly during acute phases of addiction or violence may be anointed. In less critical moments it is usually more

fitting to offer spiritual strengthening through the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist than through Anointing.

#### **6. MEMBERS OF EASTERN CHURCHES**

The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated with members of Eastern churches who ask for the sacrament of their own free will and are properly disposed. “In these particular cases also, due consideration should be given to the discipline of the Eastern churches for their own faithful and any suggestion of proselytism should be avoided” (The 1993 Directory for Ecumenism #125).

#### **7. THE UNCONSCIOUS**

“The sacrament of anointing is to be conferred on sick people who, although they have lost consciousness or the use of reasons, would as Christian believers, have at least implicitly asked for it when they were in control of their faculties” (PCS, #14).

### **C. DOUBT ABOUT ELIGIBILITY**

1. If there is doubt whether a sick person has the use of reason, is seriously ill or dead, the sacrament may be celebrated (Canon 1005).
2. There is no longer a provision for conditional anointing; the sacrament is to be administered in its usual form.

### **D. MINISTER OF THE SACRAMENT**

1. The bishop or priest is the only proper minister of the Anointing of the Sick (PCS, #16, CCL, #1003 §1).
2. Unless prevented by health or some other serious reason, priests are to respond generously to calls to minister the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick or Viaticum even when called during the night.
3. Deacons and lay ministers are asked to assist in the pastoral care of the sick by visiting the sick and administer Holy Communion. Those ministers must receive training and supervision so that they may be effective pastoral ministers (CCL, #911 §2). In order to avoid confusion with the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, Deacons, and lay ministers are not to use blessed oil or other types of oil under any circumstances in the course of their visits (CCL, #1003).

## **E. CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT**

1. The oil to be used for the Sacrament of Anointing must be the Oil of the Sick that is blessed by the Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston at the annual Chrism Masses.
2. If necessary, the volume of blessed oil may be increased by the addition of new oil, but this may not be done routinely for the sake of convenience (USCCB, 1994)
3. Any presbyter can bless the oil provided that the following conditions exist:
  - a. The oil blessed by the bishop is not at hand;
  - b. The presbyter blesses the oil during the actual celebration of the sacrament.
4. After anointing the sick person on the forehead and hands, the priest may anoint additional parts of the body such as the area of pain or injury. The sacramental form is not repeated (PCS, #124).
5. The friends and relatives of the sick person are to be encouraged to actively participate in the celebration whenever possible.

## **F. PRAYER FOR HEALING**

Any indiscriminate anointing of people who are not dangerously ill is to be avoided. The sacrament of Reconciliation and the frequent reception of communion offer spiritual comfort and strength during the time of illness.

1. Blessing prayers for adults and children who are in need of healing can be found in the *Book of Blessings*, Chapter Two.
2. Prayers for Visitation of the Sick are provided in Chapter One of the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

## **G. COMMUNAL ANOINTINGS**

A communal service of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick should be offered in each parish at least once a year. Perhaps in parishes where there is significant elderly population, this may be held more frequently. When the Anointing of the Sick is administered communally, pastors are to carefully instruct the faithful on the meaning and significance of the sacrament and that it is not to be received indiscriminately. The faithful are to be instructed that only those whose physical and mental health is seriously impaired or those who have reached advanced age are able to receive the sacrament.