ARCHDIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING AND VIATICUM

The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston offers pastoral guidelines for the appropriate celebration of the sacrament and the pastoral situations that may arise when one of the faithful is sick or dying.

These guidelines are a summary and restatement of the various parts of the Archdiocesan Pastoral Manual with particular reference to the Sacrament of Anointing and Viaticum. They are meant to be a quick reference for clergy and lay ministers as they prepare the parish community to respond to the needs of the sick and dying.

Anointing of the Sick
Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Although closely linked with the human condition, sickness cannot as a general rule be regarded as a punishment inflicted on each individual for personal sins (John 9.3). Part of the plan laid out by God’s providence is that we should fight strenuously against all sickness and carefully seek out the blessings of good health.

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 the Anointing of the Sick, which he instituted and which is described in the Letter of James.

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 of the Sick, Christ strengthens the faithful who are afflicted by illness, providing them with the strongest means of support [PCS 1-5].

1. The Proper Minister of the Sacrament
The Only Proper Minister of the Anointing of the Sick is the priest or bishop [PCS 16-17; C 1003, §1-2].

2. Persons with Whom the Sacrament of the Sick May Be Celebrated
Refer to the section in this manual titled: Identifying the Persons in Need of Care.

3. Anointing After Death
The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is not to be administered to those who are already dead. The minister should, instead, pray for the deceased [PCS 15, 223].

4. The Proper Matter for the Sacrament
Oil of the sick (olea infirmorum), blessed by the bishop each Lent, is the proper matter for the sacrament. If this is not available, the priest may bless any plant oil according to the rite, but this should be burned following the anointing [PCS 20-22; C 999, 2º].

5. Anointing and Penance
If one who is ill wishes to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance as well as the Anointing of the Sick, Penance should be celebrated during a prior visit or prior to the actual anointing. The anointing should not be viewed as a substitute for Penance, especially if the individual is in serious sin [PCS 101; BL 7/3/85].
6. *Catechesis for the Sacrament*

The faithful should receive a thorough and ongoing catechesis related to the Anointing of the Sick, including the following:

- The sacrament should be requested as soon as a serious illness is apparent.
- The sacrament should not be delayed, particularly to the moment of death.
- The sacrament should, whenever possible, be celebrated within Mass in the context of the community of faith in the parish or institution, with family and/or those providing health care to the individual present.
- Whenever possible, individuals should celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick in their home parishes before entering the hospital.
- Regular communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, with adequate catechesis to deter abuse, should be celebrated in parishes. During communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, care must be taken that only those eligible be permitted to approach the sacrament [DCD Prot. 273/89].
- Parish bulletins, sacramental packets and other modes of communication should reflect this catechesis.
- Priests, deacons, directors of religious education, ministers to the sick and others who serve in ministry to the sick and in catechesis should be thoroughly grounded in the meaning and celebration of the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick [PCS 13, 99-100; BL 7/3/85].

The catechesis for the Sacrament of Anointing should be implemented along with catechetical themes related to illness, healing, suffering and death. For themes and methods of catechesis appropriate to each age group see the section of this manual titled *Catechesis*.

7. *Communal Celebrations of the Sacrament at Sunday Mass*

The communal celebration of the Anointing of the Sick is a good practice in that it unites the community to pray for its sick members and provides a convenient opportunity for the seriously ill to receive the sacrament. However, at the Sunday Mass there is a greater possibility of indiscriminate reception of the sacrament and so a proper and clear catechesis must precede communal anointing at any Sunday Mass [BL 2/17/92].

**Holy Communion and Viaticum**

Holy Communion is important to the healing and well being of the faithful suffering from illness or near death. Pastors should see that an opportunity to receive Holy Communion is given to the sick and aged, even though not gravely sick or in imminent danger of death. This opportunity should be offered frequently and, if possible daily, especially during the Easter season [EM 40, 41]. The archdiocese provides the
following guidelines regarding administering and receiving Holy Communion and Viaticum.

1. Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion
If Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion accept the Host for the sick during Communion rite, they are to go immediately to the sick at the conclusion of Mass. It is not respectful or proper for a minister to have the Sacred Host with him or her while visiting after Mass with other parishioners [BL9/18/91].

For no reason should any Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion carry the Host while engaged in any other activity, nor should it be kept in one’s home overnight. Hosts are to be brought to the sick immediately and Hosts that are not consumed are to be returned to the tabernacle immediately [BL 9/18/91; C 935].

Persons not commissioned as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should not be given an extra Host to bring to the sick. In distributing Holy Communion, extra Hosts are not to be given to any communicant [BL 9/18/91].

2. Reverence for Host and Precious Blood
In bringing Holy Communion to the sick or homebound, the Host is to be placed in a pyx. It is not to be carried in a handkerchief or any other receptacle [BL9/18/91].

It is gross negligence to leave the Host in a room for the sick person to receive at a later time. If for any reason a sick person is not able to consume the Host immediately, it is to be returned to the tabernacle or consumed by the Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion [BL9/18/91].

It is lawful to minister Holy Communion under the appearance of wine to those who cannot receive the consecrated bread. The Precious Blood may not be reserved in the tabernacle for later use. If precious Blood is to be administered as Viaticum, it should be preserved in a leak-proof container reserved for that purpose and brought to the sick person immediately after Mass. [PCS 181]

3. Fasting
Those who are elderly or who are ill, as well as those who care for them, are excused from fasting [C 919, §3].

4. Appropriate Recipients of Viaticum
The faithful who are in danger of death from any cause should be refreshed by Holy Communion in the form of Viaticum. All the baptized who are eligible by Church law to receive Holy Communion are obliged to receive Viaticum in danger of death. [C 921] Children who have not reached the age of reason may receive Viaticum provided they can distinguish the Body of Christ from ordinary food and receive Communion reverently [C 913, §2].

5. Appropriate Time to Administer Viaticum
Holy Viaticum should not be delayed. Those involved in pastoral care are to be especially vigilant that the dying receives Viaticum while fully conscious. [PCS 27; C 922] The cause for the danger of death must be proximate, not remote. For example, a
person who is about to undergo open heart surgery is in proximate danger; a person taking an airplane trip is only in remote danger.

6. **Appropriate Frequency of Receiving Viaticum**
Even if they have already received Holy Communion that same day, it is highly recommended that those who are in danger of death communicate again. As long as the danger of death lasts, it is recommended that Holy Communion be administered a number of times, but on separate days. [C 921, §3] Even if a person has received Communion once or twice that day, Viaticum should still be received [PCS 27].

7. **Receiving Viaticum in the Form of Wine Alone**
Ideally, Viaticum should be received during Mass and under both species of bread and wine. Those who for medical reason are unable to take the consecrated bread may receive Viaticum in the form of wine alone [PCS 181].