

Baptized Christians who are members of a Protestant community may be anointed with the permission of the bishop if they do not have access to their own ministers and there is a serious reason for the anointing. Those to be anointed in this case must have a Catholic understanding of the sacrament, be spiritually disposed to receive it, and ask to be anointed on their own accord.

WHAT KIND OF HEALING TAKES PLACE?

While we pray for physical healing, we understand that God's healing may occur in many different ways. Although a *cure* implies a complete remission of bodily symptoms, healing can be physical, spiritual or emotional.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR CELEBRATING THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

The sacrament may be celebrated publicly within the mass, or at any other time when the community is gathered for prayer.

It may be celebrated in the home or hospital with friends and family.

There may be other times when the only people present are the priest and the sick person.

However it is celebrated, the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is always a communal experience. Baptism is our sacramental initiation into the Christian community. Within that community, our bonds of faith are formed by scripture and tradition, strengthened by prayer, celebrated in liturgy and nourished by the Eucharist. The presence of the community may be more evident at joyful celebrations such as baptism or

marriage, but the Christian community is likewise present during times of illness. Because of his or her place in this community of believers, the sick person, though weakened by pain or isolated by fear, never stands alone. The community is, for the sick person, a symbol of God's loving kindness. The sick person is, for the community, a symbol of Jesus Christ, who transformed human suffering into glory. Together we struggle to grasp more deeply the mystery of suffering, and hope in the promise of the resurrection. The communal nature of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick is most clearly visible, therefore, when the community gathers to pray with the sick person. For this reason a communal celebration of the sacrament is preferred. There may occasionally be times when the whole community is unable to gather to celebrate the rite. Nonetheless, the whole Church is present in the person who is anointed and in the priest. It is present in the prayers, the gestures and the blessed oil.

WHO PRESIDES AT THE SACRAMENT? CAN A DEACON OR LAYPERSON ANOINT THE SICK?

While all Christians are called to pray for, visit and reach out to the sick with the healing touch of Christ, the anointing of the sick is a sacrament of the Church for which a priest is the ordinary minister. Therefore, a deacon or layperson may not confer the sacrament.

WHAT KIND OF OIL IS USED AND WHAT IS ITS SIGNIFICANCE?

Throughout history, oil has had a long tradition of ceremonial, sacred and practical uses. It was used to strengthen athletes, to anoint kings and priests, and to heal

wounds. For sacramental use in the Church, olive oil is used. In areas of the world where olive oil is unavailable or prohibitively expensive, any high quality vegetable oil may be used.

At the Chrism Mass during Holy Week, all of the oil for use in a diocese within the coming year is blessed by the bishop. Oil is blessed for use in the catechumenate (Oil of Catechumens), for use in Confirmation, post-baptismal anointings and ordination (Sacred Chrism), and for use in the sacrament of the anointing of the sick (Oil of the Sick). This oil is distributed through the deaneries to parishes, religious communities and hospitals. Through the sacrament, we are connected to one another not only by the prayers of the Church, but by the very oil we use.

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THIS SACRAMENT AND A HEALING MASS?

In some communities, "healing masses" have become popular. People come forward for prayers and imposition of hands by lay ministers. Some participants receive the imposition of hands to show solidarity and support for a sick friend or relative.

While these services may bring the participants a sense of comfort and support from the community, it must be clearly understood that these are *not* sacramental celebrations of the anointing of the sick.

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ANOINTING OF THE SICK



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Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit. Jesus understood and shared in that suffering, but his passion transformed pain and death into the glory of the resurrection. Our life in him helps us grasp the mystery of suffering more deeply and bear our pain with greater courage.

Although Christians have always anointed and prayed for the sick, our celebration and even our understanding of the sacrament has changed throughout history. Today, many Catholics are not sure what the sacrament is, when it should be celebrated, and who should participate. As a result, some people who would benefit from the sacrament do not request it, avoid it, or participate in non-sacramental healing services, believing them to be a sacramental rite of the Church.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to introduce the history, celebration and theology of the sacrament of the anointing of the sick and give practical examples of when, where, by whom and for whom it may be celebrated.

HOW DID THE SACRAMENT DEVELOP?

WHAT IS ITS HISTORY?

This sacrament originated in the healing ministry of Jesus. In first century Palestine, sickness was often associated with sin. People who were ill suffered not only from the illness but also from the pain and guilt of isolation. As Jesus healed, he touched people with God's healing love, freed them from the pain and guilt of isolation, and restored them to their rightful places within the community.

The early Christians, knowing that the spirit of Christ was among them, continued his

healing ministry. In James 5:14-15 we read, "Is anyone among you sick? He should summon the presbyters of the church, and they should pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will raise him up. If he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven."

By the Middle Ages, perhaps due to the high mortality rate and the emphasis on the terrors of hell, the sacrament of the sick lost its association with healing, lost its communal dimension, and became a means of purifying the soul. The prayers emphasized forgiveness and personal salvation, firmly establishing the sacrament among the "last rites" ("extreme unction").

The Second Vatican Council reclaimed the original character of this sacrament. Today, it emphasizes the concern of the Church and the healing power of Christ.



WHAT IS THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK?

The anointing of the sick is a sacrament of the Church in which the priest prays, lays hands and anoints the sick person with blessed oil. It may be preceded by the sacrament of reconciliation and followed by Eucharist.

HOW OFTEN CAN SOMEONE RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT?

The sacrament may be repeated if the recipient suffers from a different illness or injury, or if the same illness or condition becomes more serious. Elderly people may be anointed if they have become weakened even though no serious illness is present.

HOW SICK DOES SOMEONE HAVE TO BE TO RECEIVE THE SACRAMENT?

Anyone who is dangerously ill due to sickness, injury or old age may be anointed. The sacrament is for serious mental or emotional illness as well. The rite states clearly that a person should be anointed at the beginning of illness, or before surgery whenever a serious condition is the reason for the surgery. The anointing may be repeated if the same illness or condition becomes more serious.

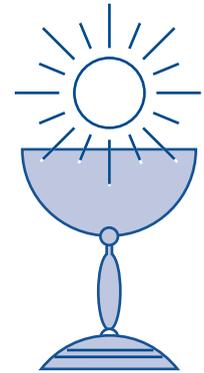
While we need not be excessively concerned about the degree of seriousness of the condition, the casual use of the sacrament for ordinary spiritual, emotional and physical challenges can seriously lessen its spiritual impact on both the individual and the community.

CAN SOMEONE BE ANOINTED IF HE OR SHE IS IN A COMA?

The anointing of the sick may be conferred upon people who have lost consciousness or use of reason, if it is presumed that they would have asked for the sacrament if they were able.

WHAT IS VIATICUM?

When the Eucharist is received at the time of passage from this life, it is called *viaticum*, something "with us on the way." It is a special sign of our participation in the mystery of the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord. While the anointing of the sick is for those suffering from illness or infirmity, the sacrament for the dying is the Eucharist.



CAN SOMEONE BE ANOINTED AFTER DEATH?

All sacraments of the Church, including the anointing of the sick, are encounters between a *living* person and God, celebrated within the context of the Christian community. There are specific prayers designed for the commendation of the dead to the mercy of God and for the consolation of the bereaved.

CAN ANYONE BESIDES A CATHOLIC BE ANOINTED?

Under ordinary circumstances the Anointing of the Sick is administered to Catholics who have lived according to the Gospel (are in a state of grace), or those who at this time of trial seek conversion back to a life of grace.

Christians who are members of separated Eastern Churches may be anointed whenever they ask for the sacrament on their own and are properly disposed to receive the sacrament.