



DIocese OF AUSTIN

ANOINTING OF THE SICK



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In order to serve the needs of the people of God in the Diocese of Austin and to be responsible stewards of the gifts given to the diocese, the Diocese of Austin issues the following policy:

- I. Suffering and illness have always been among the greatest problems that trouble the human spirit.
 - A. 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 (Jn 9:3).
 - B. The Lord himself showed great concern for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the sick and commanded his followers to do likewise.
 - C. 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 is made known in the Letter of James.
- II. 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.
 - A. 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.
- III. The only minister of the Anointing of the Sick is the priest or Bishop.
- IV. The sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick may be celebrated:
 - A. With those whose health is seriously impaired by sickness or old age
 - B. Before surgery

- C. With elderly people who have become notably weakened, even though no serious illness is present
 - D. With seriously ill children who have sufficient use of reason to be strengthened by the sacrament
 - E. With those who have been anointed, if they relapse after recovery or if the condition becomes more serious
 - F. With those who are unconscious or who have lost the use of reason, if there is probability they would have asked for the sacrament were they in control of their faculties
 - G. With those who are judged to have a serious mental illness
- V. Judgment on the suitability of a candidate for anointing should be made prudently and without scruple.
- VI. Non-baptized persons should not receive the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.
- VII. After Death
- A. The sacrament of Anointing of the Sick is not to be administered to those who are already dead.
 - 1. The minister should, instead, pray for the deceased.
- VIII. The proper matter for the sacrament is Oil of the Sick (*Oleum Infirmorum*) blessed by the Bishop at the Chrism Mass.
- A. If this is not available, the priest may bless any plant oil according to the rite, but this should be burned following the anointing.
- IX. Anointing and Penance
- A. If one who is ill wishes to celebrate the sacrament of Penance as well as the Anointing of the Sick, Penance should be celebrated prior to the actual anointing.
 - B. The anointing should not be viewed as a substitute for Penance, especially if the individual is in serious sin.
- X. Catechesis
- The faithful should receive a thorough and ongoing catechesis related to the Anointing of the Sick including the following:
- A. The sacrament should be requested as soon as a serious illness is apparent.

- B. The sacrament should not be delayed, particularly to the moment of death.
 - C. The sacrament should, whenever possible, be celebrated within the context of the community of faith in the parish or institution, with family and/or those providing health care to the individual.
 - D. Whenever possible, individuals should celebrate the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick in their home parishes before entering the hospital.
 - E. Regular communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, with adequate catechesis to deter abuse, should be celebrated in parishes.
 - 1. During communal celebrations of the Anointing of the Sick, care must be taken that only those eligible be permitted to approach the sacrament (c. 921).
 - F. Parish bulletins, sacramental packets, and other modes of communication should reflect this catechesis.
 - G. 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.
- XI. 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.
- A. 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 anointing at any Sunday Mass.
- XII. Pastoral Questions on the Anointing of the Sick
- A. Anointing of Persons in Invalid Marriages

Times of serious illness are often opportunities for assisting persons to return to a more active participation of the faith.

 - 1. Persons in invalid marriages facing a real danger of death can receive the Anointing of the Sick if they promise to seek to regularize their marriage as soon as possible after recovery of their health.
 - 2. In cases where the illness is permanently debilitating or death is proximate, the period of conjugal relationship in marriage is understood to be past. In these cases, the ill person should be encouraged to celebrate the sacrament of Penance and the Anointing of the Sick may follow (*Pastoral Care of the Sick*, 7).

B. Anointing of Unbaptized

1. A person must be baptized in order to receive other sacraments.
2. Prayers for the sick, commendations for the dying, and prayers after death may be offered for the unbaptized.
3. If the dying person requests baptism, he or she should be baptized as soon as possible.

C. Anointing of Non-Catholic Christians

1. In ordinary circumstances, the sacrament is licitly administered only to Catholics.
2. Priests may anoint separated Eastern Christians (i.e. the Eastern Orthodox) and those in canonically equivalent churches when those persons ask for the sacrament on their own and are properly disposed.
3. Protestants may be anointed in danger of death or for grave necessity when they cannot approach a minister of their own denomination provided they:
 - a. Ask for the sacrament on their own
 - b. Manifest a Catholic faith in it
 - c. Are properly disposed (c. 844; PCS¹)

¹ *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*