



Pastoral Guidelines on the Healing Ministry of the Church
April 30, 2025

Preamble:

1. The Healing Ministry of the Church

In the ongoing mission of evangelization (bringing the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ) the Church has always prayed for healing as did our Lord while on earth. In the development of the sacramental theology, the Church recognized two of the seven Sacraments as specifically ordered towards healing: the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. Both of these Sacraments have a matter and a form and some criteria in order for them to be validly celebrated. In addition to the celebration of these two Sacraments of healing, the Church recognizes that the Holy Spirit distributes charisms to those whom He wills for the purpose of building up and sanctifying the people of God. One of these charisms is the charism of healing which is often manifested in prayers for the faithful for healing using blessed oil.

2. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick

Only priests (bishops and presbyters) are ministers of the Anointing of the Sick. Like all sacraments, the Anointing of the Sick is a liturgical and communal celebration whether it takes place in the family home or apartment, a hospital, long-term care facility, or church. In recent times, with fewer priests and wanting to make the Lord's healing grace more accessible to the faithful, the practice of offering the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick regularly in communal celebrations of the parish community has become more common. While recognizing this as appropriate and noble there is still the need to offer a proper catechesis to the faithful on the purpose and criteria for coming to receive the sacrament. The purpose of the sacrament is firstly to strengthen the faithful to overcome the difficulties that go with the condition of a serious illness or the frailty of old age. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, it is meant to renew trust and faith in God and strengthen one against the temptations of the evil one. It is meant to lead the sick person to healing of the soul but also to healing of the body as the Lord wills. Catechesis should encourage the faithful to approach the sacrament with faith and confidence in the Lord's love and desire to touch them with His healing grace. The priest should pray for the sick with faith and confidence in the Lord's desire to heal His people leaving the results to the Lord.

3. Other Prayers and Ministries of Healing

The Greek word *sozo* is translated as salvation in the scriptures. *Sozo* means to be forgiven, delivered, set free, healed, made whole, restored and preserved. The salvation that Our Lord Jesus Christ merited for each of us by His sacrifice on the Cross was a complete salvation that provides for every human need: spiritual, psychological, emotional and for our temporal needs. Therefore, it is the Lord's desire that His people be set free of those things that bind them and hold them back from experiencing the freedom in Him and to be made whole. The author of the book of Hebrews describes this complete salvation by saying, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation (Heb 2:3)."

Today in our world we find and come in contact with people who suffer from a multitude of sicknesses, conditions and suffering. They are often not physically sick but suffer from such conditions as chronic depression, anxiety, fear, eating disorders, phobias, PTSD, ADHD, OCD and the list goes on. All of these conditions dispose a person to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.

Additionally, many people suffer from emotional wounds from past abuse, trauma, or terrible words that have been spoken to them. There are also those who desire prayers for healing on a regular basis. While these conditions and situations do not normally come under the criteria for the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, both Jesus and His Church desire to bring relief and healing to these people. The full ministry of healing that the Lord makes available by means of His Church goes beyond the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and its full breadth should be made available to the faithful.

The opportunity to minister and pray for healing and wholeness in ways that fall outside the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is to be encouraged and could be offered privately, or in communal settings with a para-liturgical, or even following the celebration of the Eucharist. Other opportunities for prayers for healing may be parish missions, retreats and conferences. Prayers for healing may be offered in these circumstances by a Priest, a Deacon or a Layperson who is recognized as mature and gifted in praying for healing. In these circumstances, there should be good pastoral oversight that the faithful are guided in who is commissioned by the Church to pray for them for healing. This can be done by having prayer team stations or those praying at the front of the church. The faithful should be directed to who they should go to for prayer.

In these circumstances where prayers for healing are offered, often blessed oil is used as a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence and the Lord's healing grace. The faithful should be made aware of this, that although they are not receiving the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, the church recognizes the charism of healing that God uses as well as the sacraments to bring His grace, healing and sanctification to His people.

It is the hope, that with this pastoral guidance, that we as the Church will be able to offer the Lord's healing grace in as many ways as possible to a broken and wounded world. In our efforts to evangelize, healing is a sign of the truth of the Gospel – Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and offers each and every person reconciliation with the Father through His work on the Cross. The Holy Spirit continues to be poured out and through signs and wonders bears witness to the risen Christ.

In the Archdiocese of Halifax-Yarmouth, the following norms are to be observed concerning communal celebrations of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and of other healing ministries:

1. Whenever communal celebrations of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick are celebrated, the following should be observed:
 - a. Parishes are to request permission from the Diocesan Bishop for celebrations of this kind (Pastoral Care, n. 108), which can be a means of ensuring that the sacrament is readily available to those who may be in need of its effects. A permission can be given for parishes that seek to offer the Sacrament on a regular basis.
 - b. Those wishing to receive the sacrament should register either in advance, or before the celebration begins. A register with the date and name of the individual should be prepared.
 - c. The Sacrament of Penance should be offered immediately before the celebration, for those who require it, since it is closely connected with the Anointing of the Sick.
 - d. At every celebration of this kind, catechesis must be given on the nature of the sacrament and on who may receive the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, namely:
 - i. Those who are suffering from a serious illness or chronic condition. This may be physical or psychological.
 - ii. Those who are going into the hospital for an operation or to be treated for a serious illness.
 - iii. Those who are frail by reason of old age may receive the sacrament.

- iv. Generally, the sacrament should be celebrated once with the sick person. If the person recovers but should develop another grave illness the sacrament may be repeated. If the illness should worsen the sacrament may also be repeated.
 - v. Those present who are not receiving the sacrament should be encouraged to intercede for those being prayed for in union with the communion of the saints.
 - vi. The liturgical norms laid out in the blue Pastoral Care book should be observed, especially that in communal celebrations, the sacrament of the Anointing is to be administered after the homily.
2. When other prayers for healing are offered in communal settings, either on their own or in connection with a liturgy, the following should be observed.
- a. Any healing prayers/ministry should follow the liturgical celebration rather than be inserted within the liturgy itself.
 - b. Prayers for healing may be included in the prayers of the faithful, and other prayers and readings that relate to the healing ministry of the Church may be used drawing from the Roman Missal and the Lectionary.
 - c. The Oil of the Sick (*Oleum Infirmorum*) is only to be used when administering the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. For all other anointings, regular oil is used, which may be blessed using another rite (different from that given for the blessing of the Oil of the Sick), or another sacramental oil may be used, such as the Oil of St. Joseph.
 - i. The distinction between this oil and the Oil of the Sick should be made clear to the faithful.
 - ii. It should be made clear to the faithful that they are not receiving the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick.
 - d. Catechesis must be regularly given on the distinction between the sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and other charismatic prayers for healing.
 - e. Clergy and laity who serve in ministries of healing should be well catechised and trained and gifted with the necessary charisms to effectively carry out this ministry.
 - f. The terms “Extreme Unction” and “Last Rites” were abrogated. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick replaced the former and the Commendation of the Dying replaced the latter. Please refer to the Pastoral Care book for fuller details on these experiences of prayer.