

## **SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

*Frequently Asked Questions provided by  
The Via Lucis Catholic Hospice Ministry of Samaritan Healthcare & Hospice.*

### **What is the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick?**

The Church sees the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick as a way of carrying forth Christ's ministry of healing. This sacrament has its origin in apostolic times. (Jas 5:14-15). The priest lays his hands on the head of the sick person and then anoints, with the Blessed Oil of the Sick, the forehead and hands of the sick person while praying, "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." (CCC, no. 1513)

The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick can take place in a family home, a hospital or church, for a single sick person or a group of sick persons. (CCC, no. 1517)



### **When should a Catholic receive this sacrament?**

Seriously ill persons and older persons in weak condition should be encouraged to ask for the anointing and not wait until the point of death. Sick children may be anointed if their understanding allows them to be comforted by the sacrament.

### **How is this sacrament given?**

Only bishops and priests may be ministers of this sacrament. Following a penitential rite and reading from Scripture, the priest lays his hands on the head of the sick person. He then proceeds to anoint, with the blessed Oil of the Sick, the forehead and hands of the sick person while praying (See What is the Sacrament... above).

### **What is the primary effect of this sacrament?**

The hope, if it be God's will, is that the person is physically healed of illness. But even if there is no physical healing, the primary effect of the sacrament is a spiritual healing by which the sick person receives the Holy Spirit's gift of peace and courage to deal with the difficulties that accompany serious illness or the frailty of old age.

### **Does a dying person receive the last rites?**

At one time, the anointing of someone who was nearing life's end was known as The Last Rites. Today that reference is no longer used. If the dying person is conscious, the Church offers a dying person penance, anointing, and the Eucharist as Viaticum (food for the journey) given at the end of life. An unconscious dying person may be anointed. The emphasis is on trust in God's promise of eternal life rather than on the struggle against illness. Prayers for the Commendation of the Dying may be prayed repeatedly and by anyone present.

### **What if the person has already died?**

The priest will not administer the Sacrament of Anointing but will pray for the dead person. Sacraments are celebrated for the living, yet the dead are effectively helped by the prayers of the living. Prayers after death may be led by anyone and prayed by all present.