

Renewal of Pastoral Care for the Housebound and the Sick

Te Awakairangi Parish

(Reading Material)

Pastoral Care of People Who Are Sick or Housebound

The Church offers support to people who are sick, housebound, or nearing the end of life through a group of sacraments often referred to as the *Rites of Anointing and Pastoral Care of the Sick*. These include Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick and Holy Communion.

Reconciliation is encouraged throughout a person's life as a source of healing, peace, and forgiveness.

Anointing of the Sick is offered to those who are seriously ill. It may be received more than once if a person's condition worsens or if they recover and become ill again. This sacrament is celebrated by a priest, who anoints the person's forehead, saying:

“Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.”

The person responds: “Amen.”

The priest then anoints the hands, saying:

“May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”

Again, the person responds: “Amen.”

Holy Communion may be brought to people who are unable to attend Mass. As death approaches, it may be given as *Viaticum*, the final Holy Communion, often described as “food for the journey” into eternal life.

Alongside these sacraments, the Church offers prayers for those who are sick, dying, and for those who have died, expressing care, compassion, and hope in Christ.

Anointing of the Sick

Anointing of the Sick is ideally celebrated within the faith community, where people can support one another through prayer and presence. It may take place during a parish Mass, in a home, hospital, or care facility. In urgent situations, it may be celebrated privately with only the priest and the person receiving the sacrament present. While this is valid, it is considered an exception.

The Church teaches that this sacrament may be received by:

- People whose health is seriously affected by illness or old age
- Those facing major surgery due to a serious condition
- Older people who are significantly weakened
- Children who are seriously ill and have sufficient understanding (or when in doubt, the sacrament may still be given)

A careful and thoughtful judgment is used to determine the seriousness of illness, and medical advice may be helpful.

The Anointing of the Sick is intended specifically for those who are seriously ill. It is not meant as a general ritual for everyone or as a replacement for Reconciliation. It is also not reserved only for those who are dying. The appropriate sacrament for the dying is *Viaticum*.

Holy Communion for People Who Are Sick or Housebound

Holy Communion is brought to people who cannot attend Mass, including those who are sick, elderly, housebound, or in hospitals or care homes. This ministry ensures that all members of the Church can continue to receive the Eucharist, the source and summit of Christian life.

The Church encourages frequent reception of Holy Communion for those who are unwell, particularly during times of weakness and during the Easter season.

Those who bring Communion represent both Christ and the wider community. For the person receiving Communion, this is a sign of Christ's presence and the loving care of the Church.

Whenever possible, Communion is taken directly from Mass to highlight the connection between the Eucharistic celebration and pastoral care.

Ministers may be sent with words such as:

“You are now to carry the Body of our Lord from this Eucharistic assembly to those who are unable to be here. Share with them our greetings, read the Scriptures with them, pray with them, and give them this most precious sacrament.”

Communion in Homes, Hospitals, and Care Facilities

When visiting people in homes, hospitals, or care facilities, ministers are encouraged to be respectful, attentive, and sensitive to each person’s condition.

A simple structure may include:

- A greeting and time for pastoral presence
- A short reading from Scripture
- The Lord’s Prayer
- Distribution of Holy Communion
- A concluding prayer

In hospitals and care settings, ministers should respect local guidelines and the person’s physical condition. Fatigue, pain, and medical restrictions should always be considered.

Where possible, small gatherings for a Liturgy of the Word with Communion may be arranged. Otherwise, Communion may be shared simply and reverently with individuals. No formal blessing is given in these situations.

Viaticum: Communion for the Dying

Viaticum is Holy Communion given to a person who is near death. The word means “food for the journey.”

From early Christian tradition, Viaticum has been understood as spiritual nourishment for the final journey into eternal life.

Church teaching states:

“Those who are in danger of death are to be strengthened by Holy Communion as Viaticum.”

The Catechism describes Viaticum as:

“the seed of eternal life and the power of resurrection.”

Whenever possible, Viaticum is celebrated within Mass. When this is not possible, it is given in a special rite outside of Mass.

A key part of Viaticum is the renewal of baptismal promises, where the person expresses their lifelong faith and commitment.

The minister offers Holy Communion with the words:

“May the Lord Jesus Christ protect you and lead you to eternal life.”

If necessary, Communion may be given under one form only.

The rite concludes with a sign of peace, offering both farewell and Christian hope in the resurrection. It is a moment of deep faith, trust, and love.

Conclusion

Pastoral care for people who are sick or housebound is a sacred ministry of the Church. It reflects Christ’s compassion for those who are suffering or vulnerable.

Through prayer, presence, and the sacraments, the Church continues to offer healing, comfort, and hope.

Te Awakairangi Parish remains committed to walking alongside every person in times of sickness and in health, at every stage of life, ensuring that no one is ever alone in their journey of faith.