

When
Someone
ill



I was sick and you visited me

It is God who forgives all your guilt, who heals everyone of your ills, who redeems your life from the grave, who crowns you with love and compassion

A Guide to the Pastoral Care of the Sick—St Gregory's Parish, Preston

The Pastoral Care the Sick

The sickness and incapacity of any member of the Church is not a matter of only private concern. The Church is the Body of Christ and we are all members of His Body.

If one member suffers, all suffer; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together

1 Corinthians 12 v26

At the same time, we have a right to a certain amount of privacy. It will always be for each person to agree to what information about an illness is made available to the Parish Priest and to how widely information may be shared—for example, in public prayers in the Church.

The Community of Faith must desire to accompany one another through the trials of sickness with the comfort and encouragement that comes from prayer and the sacraments. Three sacraments in particular are appropriate for regular celebration with those who are sick:

- **The Anointing of the Sick:** The older people among us will remember the sacrament called “Extreme Unction” which was celebrated as close as possible to the time of death. Old habits die hard and it takes a long time for us to adapt to change. “Extreme Unction” or “Last Anointing” ceased to exist in 1973 ! It was replaced by **The Sacrament of the Sick**. This Sacrament is to be celebrated as soon as serious illness begins and should be repeated often for as long as the illness lasts. The proper Sacrament for someone who is close to death is called **Viaticum**—it translates as “With You on the Journey”. This Sacrament is essentially Holy Communion with prayers for the dying person. Clearly it should be celebrated while the dying person is still able to receive Holy Communion.
- **The Sacrament of Reconciliation:** Often the experience of illness, as well as the enforced inactivity during the time of illness, means that we have the opportunity to reflect on our lives. This is a time when we might appropriately seek the forgiveness of God for what has been sinful in our lives. Through this Sacrament, we can know the faithfulness and mercy of God. The Sacrament of Reconciliation can, of course, be celebrated in the home of the person who is sick.
- **The Sacrament of the Eucharist:** Sometimes Mass could be celebrated in the home of the sick person. More commonly and more frequently, Holy Communion will be brought from the celebration of the parish Mass to the sick person. Other members of the family and even friends and neighbours can receive Communion on such an occasion. With the assistance of our Extra Ordinary Ministers of Holy Communion, it is possible for those who are sick or

housebound to receive Communion at least once a week.

If you or someone in the family falls seriously ill, but can confidently expect to be well again in two or three weeks time, ask for prayers to be said by the parish community. A list of the names of those who are sick is printed each week in the parish newsletter—ask to have your name included—and don't forget to have it removed when you are well again ! The priest may be able to visit, but perhaps in this circumstance visits will be more commonly made by your friends within the parish community. If you are unable to attend Sunday Mass, then ask for Holy Communion to be brought to you at home. Telephone the Parish House or get someone to make the request on your behalf.

If you or someone in the family falls seriously ill, and is housebound for more than two or three weeks, then ask for the priest to come and visit you. Telephone the Parish House and ask for the Sacrament of the Sick or get someone to make the request for you. The Sacrament of the Sick is commonly celebrated several times during a prolonged illness. Sometimes this is because the illness has worsened or simply because the sick person will benefit from the comfort and consolation which the Sacrament gives. Remember—ASK for these Sacraments; don't expect your need and desire to be recognized by others, including the priest.

If you or a member of the family goes into hospital, it is especially important to ASK to be visited. The hospital is not allowed to give your name or information about you to the hospital chaplain unless you actually say you want this to happen. So if you or someone in your family goes into hospital, it is very important to let the priest know. Phone the Parish House so that your stay in hospital can be brought to the attention of the Chaplain. You can also make sure you inform the hospital that you wish to be visited by the Chaplain. If you do not do this, it is possible you will not see anyone or have Holy Communion and the Sacrament of the Sick while you are in hospital. It is also appropriate to have the Sacrament of the Sick before going into hospital for major surgery.

If someone is dying, they may well have received the Sacrament of the Sick many times already. Hopefully this will be the case if they have been ill for some time—and that they have been receiving Holy Communion during the same period. Thus the “Last Rites” no longer have the significance that they once had. However, those who are dying should receive Holy Communion as Viaticum—which can be received more than once according to the needs of the dying person. Clearly this Sacrament requires that the dying person be able to receive Holy Communion.

When the priest or a Minister of Holy Communion is bringing Holy Communion to one who is ill at home, it is usual to make some preparation in the room where Communion will be received. Wherever possible, there should be a small table covered with a white cloth. On the table there should be a candle and a crucifix.