Catholic Christian ministry to those who are sick and housebound

A few years ago Pope Francis wrote:

> The supreme witness of the Father's merciful love for the sick is his only-begotten Son. How often do the Gospels relate Jesus' encounters with people suffering from various diseases! He 'went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people' (*Mt 4:23*).
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> We do well to ask ourselves why Jesus showed such great concern for the sick, so much so that he made it paramount in the mission of the apostles, who were sent by the Master to proclaim the Gospel and to heal the sick (*cf. Lk 9:2*).
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> *Message of Pope Francis:*
> *Thirtieth World Day Of The Sick, February 11, 2022*

That final question — "***Why*** did Jesus show such concern for the sick?" — is a good one for us to try to find our answer to. And for that answer to guide (and maybe even challenge) us in how we relate to people who are sick and housebound..

We may each have different answers. But it is clear from the Gospels that Jesus had care and compassion for all who suffered and were in need — the sick and those who were pushed to the sidelines, the poor and the neglected, those who felt abandoned, and even felt abandoned by God.

If we have ever found ourselves in such situations we will know how painful and depressing it can be, and how hopeless it can make us feel. If such is someone's unrelieved experience day after day, they can experience such misery.

The ministry of Jesus

Jesus responded to the misery of others in his own person, as himself. In the Sacrament of his humanity he brought the love of God to those who had such need. Disciples of the Lord, such as us, are called to do the same. "Where I am, there will my servant be also" (*John 12.26*).

Jesus was renowned as a healer. The Gospels tell how he healed bodies as well as spirits. We may think such miracles are beyond us - but it is amazing to see what a difference it can make even to people's physical well being when someone shows care for the neglected, takes interest in those who may think of themselves as just a burden to themselves and others.

Please take a copy of this leaflet so you can direct others to the help available.

And maybe you will want to join our teams of parish volunteers !

Catholic health care professionals

Of course some of us, disciples of the Lord, have developed skills in ministering to people who are ill and in difficulty. Some have trained as social workers, nurses, doctors - so as to make the most of the gifts the Lord has given them. They have dedicated their professional life to the vocation of care and healing. These men and women can do precious work within their profession simply by the example they give to Christian values, as they respect the human dignity of all those they serve, at all stages in life. As controversy continues about replacing end-of-life care with options for 'assisted suicide' such example has an important part to play in society at large.

Other Christian ministers - clergy and lay - do well when they take the opportunity to give support and encouragement to these their brothers and sisters who dedicate themselves to such work..

Other Christian ministers

Christian ministry to people in need is also offered by other people and in a variety of ways.

- Most regularly Christian ministry to those in need is exercised by their Christian brothers and sisters acting on their own initiative. Friend caring for friend, neighbour for neighbour. Sometimes individuals who find themselves drawn to this sort of work will find help and support by coming together in independent groups, such as the Society of St Vincent de Paul.
- Some Christian ministry is carried out by those who serve publicly in the name of the Church. This includes the sacramental ministry of the Church (for example the anointing of the sick; and ministering Holy Communion to the sick and viaticum to the dying). It is exercised by men ordained as priests or deacons - and by women and men appointed or instituted to serve as ministers of Holy Communion, as parish visitors, or members of a chaplaincy team. In the final analysis the work of these ministers is carried out on behalf of the bishop of the diocese, though usually he entrusts the responsibility for the management and supervision of these ministers to a parish priest or chaplain.

Ministering on behalf of the parish of St Nicholas

First of all, thank you to all of those members of the parish who — on their own initiative — minister to their friends and neighbours, responding to need as they encounter it. The good you do will never be known by others, not least because so much of it is done privately, with fuss, without need for acknowledgement. But it is good to be able to acknowledge it and offer appreciation of what you do for those in need, and for - when others do come to know of it - the good example you set before us. So thank you.

Sometimes you may find the needs you are trying to respond to become more challenging than you feel able to cope with alone. Perhaps the needs of your family member, friend or neighbour require a level of support that you simply cannot provide. Or maybe what you are doing to support another person is beginning to have a costly, challenging impact on you yourself, perhaps on your finances, your mental health, or the life of your family.

If this is so it can be very helpful to know you are encouraged to reach out to find some support for your self. You might find this through the services offered by health professions or local specialist support groups - for example for those caring for people with dementia. However you might find it helpful also to talk with Fr Allen, or with others from the parish.

What our parish offers to parishioners who are sick or housebound - and their carers

- Prayer
- Visits
- The opportunity to receive Holy Communion at home or in hospital/care home.
- The opportunity to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick at Mass or at home as soon as those who are sick begin to experience significant illness or impairment of their daily life. [1]
- The Sacrament of Anointing is also ministered regularly at a monthly Wednesday morning Mass. That Mass is generally followed by a simple social gathering for those who wish to attend.
- Confession on request
- Support while in hospital or other care facilities
- From September, there will be monthly Saturday morning social meetings for carers, ending with brief and simple prayer for carers and those in their care.

How we offer this ministry

As already noted some parishioners who offer support to others do this as individuals, supporting friends or neighbours and calling on the parish to bring Holy Communion etc, as needed.

The things we do collegially, as parish, we can only do to the extent that members of the parish make themselves available to help. People can help in this way in two particular ways.

- Offering support or guidance to others based on their professional or personal experience.
- Serving as ministers of Holy Communion who visit - once or twice a month - one or more people who are housebound, in their homes or care home. Some are able to able to carry out this ministry more regularly.
- By helping organise and staff the new monthly gatherings for Carers, or the social after the Wednesday 'Anointing Mass'.

Other parishioners come together under the auspices of the *Society of St Vincent de Paul* (SVP) and carry out their good works as members of that Society.

In all cases our work as parish (and as SVP) is carried out in accordance with the Archdiocesan Safeguarding procedures. All of those who visit more than twice a month, on behalf of the parish - rather than as neighbours or friends - are required to provide a DBS certificate, available via the parish safeguarding officer. This is for the benefit of those we serve, and of us ourselves.

Wanting to help? Able to help?

Do please come and speak with me. There is plenty you can help with! Come and have a chat and ask your questions over a cup of coffee!

Fr. Allen Mans

21st August 2026

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1. It is many years now since the Anointing of the sick has been seen as 'the Last Sacrament', Extreme Unction or 'Final Rites' for the dying.

The Sacrament of Anointing is for those who experience significant illness - physical or mental. Through his Church Jesus minsters his love and care to accompany people's experience of sickness and the challenges that brings them. It is a sacrament that people may receive repeatedly should their illness be extended, as it often is.

The last Sacrament is intended to be Viaticum, a final ministering of Holy Communion as food for the journey.