

Guidelines on Ministration to the Sick In the Episcopal Church in Arkansas

(revised April 29, 2008)

The Christian Church has long been active in working for the healing of the sick among us. This ministry has taken such varied forms as the founding of hospitals and the naming of parish nurses.

Our immediate response to the illness of others can be as varied as sitting with sick people at their homes or taking Communion to someone in a hospital or nursing home. The Episcopal Church has liturgical resources to assist us in our ministry to the sick. The primary ones are:

- *The Book of Common Prayer* – Ministration to the Sick (p. 453).
- *Enriching Our Worship 2: Ministry with the Sick or Dying* (This resource is approved for use through 2009 under the direction of the local bishop.)

These liturgical rites cover a number of pastoral situations, and they allow for the participation of both members of the laity and the clergy. When ministering to the sick while using one of the approved liturgical rites, please pay particular attention to the roles assigned to the different orders of ministry.

If you are a lay person who is taking communion to the sick, please do so under the direction of the rector or priest in charge of your congregation. Lay eucharistic visitors need to receive a license from the bishop. You obtain these upon training and recommendation from your local priest. The bishop's administrative assistant is in charge of preparing the licenses for the bishop's signature.

If you are visiting a sick person in the hospital or home, or if you are involved in the laying on of hands for healing in a worship service, please remember that, while the laying on of hands is a ministry exercised by many people with the gift of healing, anointing with oil is customarily done by a priest. Thus:

- If you are in a worship service or church setting where a priest is present, no one except a priest should anoint the sick with oil.
- If you are visiting a sick person in the hospital or home and a priest is present, no one except a priest should anoint the sick with oil.

As the Book of Common Prayer states, in cases of necessity, a deacon or lay person may perform the anointing, using oil blessed by a bishop or priest. "Necessity" means:

- The anointing is not a repeated practice with the sick individual,
- The sick individual is in great distress, and a priest is not available, or
- The individual is facing a particular procedure, and a priest is not available.

Thus, deacons and lay people do not anoint the sick with oil while making regular, planned visits to houses and nursing homes, including times that they take Communion from the Reserved Sacrament to the sick.

Also please remember that deacons and lay people do not pronounce blessings as a liturgical action. This includes blessings of people who choose not to receive Holy Communion whether it is being distributed in a church service, in a hospital, or at home. One option for deacons or lay people is to (hold the hand of the person who does not wish communion and) say to that person, “The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ keep you in everlasting life.”

At the end of liturgies, deacons and lay people pronounce a dismissal instead of a blessing.