

taking Holy Communion to the sick and housebound. These words may be based on the words of the Communion antiphon, on the readings of the day, or in a simple form such as:

Go now, to our sisters and brothers  
unable to be with us for reasons of sickness and infirmity.

Take to them from our celebration the word of God and Holy Communion, that they might share with us these signs of the Lord's goodness.

## Viaticum

Although usually viaticum will normally first be ministered by the priest, often within a celebration of Mass, the dying should be given the opportunity to receive Holy Communion as viaticum on successive days, frequently if not daily.

The rite of 'Viaticum outside Mass' is printed in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*. Ministers should also be familiar with the prayers for the 'Commendation of the Dying' and the 'Prayers for the Dead', which are also printed in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*.

## Ministers and preparation for Funeral Rites

Frequently, a minister of Holy Communion will develop a close pastoral relationship with the sick and the housebound, as well as their families and friends. Because of this, when a person dies, that minister will often be well placed to assist the family in their preparation for the funeral rites. Sometimes the family will know the lay minister better than they know the parish priest.

This assistance may be given either by accompanying the family at their first meeting with the priest, or, with the priest's agreement, and after proper formation by preparing the funeral rites with the family.

## Additional Resources

- Genevieve Glen, OSB *et al.* *Ministers of Care*, Chicago: Liturgical Training Publications, 1997
- Marty Haugen. *To Serve as Jesus did*. Chicago: GIA Publications, 2005.

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*Ministering Holy Communion to the sick and the housebound* is one of a series of resources prepared by the Liturgy Commission to support the continuing formation of liturgical ministers in Westminster diocese. Other resources can be downloaded from [www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy](http://www.rcdow.org.uk/liturgy)

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# Ministering Holy Communion to the sick and the housebound

An introduction for commissioned ministers of Holy  
Communion in Westminster Diocese

One of the most important developments in the Church's ministry to the sick over the past decades has been the introduction of lay liturgical ministers. These ministers have enabled the sick and the housebound to receive Holy Communion with greater frequency. Through their commitment and generosity they have supplemented and complemented the ministry of the Church's priests.

This leaflet offers some brief guidance for those called to this ministry.

## Visits to the Sick

The ministering of Holy Communion to the sick finds its setting in the broader context of visits and ministry to the sick.

The minister of Holy Communion will generally find him or herself part of a team of ministers - including the parish priest, family and friends, perhaps ministers of the parish's St. Vincent de Paul group or other similar organisation, alongside medical and social services professionals. It is to the benefit of all when there is mutual respect and cooperation between members of this broad ministry team.

The visitor can offer support to the sick and housebound in a number of ways. This include their being:

- *a link to the parish community*. Be sure to bring the latest copies of the parish newsletter and *Westminster Record*, our diocesan newspaper, so they can keep informed of the life of the wider Church.
- *a link to the parish priest* - letting him know for example if there is a request for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick or of Penance.
- *someone who will pray with them and for them*
- *someone they can share their worries and concerns with*.

Ministers should at all times respect the privacy and right to confidentiality of those to whom they minister. Without their explicit permission, they should not pass on confidential information to others.

## Communion to the Sick

How the needs of the sick are met is a matter for the parish to consider. Different people will wish to receive Holy Communion with regularity. Some will have been used to being at Mass daily, others weekly, others still less frequently. It is good if a parish and its ministry team are able to honour different people's different needs.

The rite of 'Communion of the Sick' includes a liturgy of the word as well as of Holy Communion. Some parishes ensure that they send a minister of the word and a minister of Holy Communion to the sick, to assist with the different parts

of the rite. (This can also have the advantage that, during holidays or should one of the team be ill, there can be a continuity of pastoral care.)

The rites for 'Communion of the Sick' are provided in the *Pastoral Care of the Sick*. Extracts are available in a number of publications including *Communion of the Sick* (revised edition, McCrimmons, 1996).

- When Communion is taken to someone daily then the daily Lectionary can be used. When Communion is taken weekly or less frequently then the Sunday Lectionary can be used.
- Sometimes the person being ministered to is well able to take an active part in the rite. At other times the person will be less able. The minister should judge whether the rite should be adapted. However very often, the sick person will derive benefit from hearing the liturgy prayed, even if they are themselves unable to make responses or in any other obvious way participate in the prayer.
- Ministers should be comfortable with spending times of silence with those to whom they minister.
- Ministers should welcome family members and friends of the sick to join in the prayer. Those who are Catholic, and wish, may receive Holy Communion at this time, even if they have already that day received Holy Communion at Mass.

## Dismissal of Commissioned Ministers taking Communion to the Housebound or Sick

It is fitting for Holy Communion to be taken directly from Mass to the sick or those unable to leave their homes.

- Appropriate times for the ministers of Holy Communion to receive a pyx from the priest and be 'sent' to take Holy Communion and leave the assembly are either after the Communion of the people or immediately before the final blessing.
- The ministers may depart before the Prayer after Communion prayer; immediately after the Prayer after-Communion; or as part of the concluding procession of ministers.

Local circumstances will determine which of these various options will be most fitting in any particular parish.

The priest will normally speak words of dismissal or missioning over the ministers