

Anointing of the Sick and Their Pastoral Care

Guidance and Resources from the Office of Worship,
the Diocese of Sacramento

The New Book

The 2026 *Order of the Anointing of the Sick and Their Pastoral Care* (ASPC) is the only English version which may be used in the United States beginning April 5, 2026; it may also be used now. The same is true for the 2026 *Ritual de la Unción de los Enfermos y de su Atención Pastoral* for Spanish.

Publishers

PUBLISHER ¹	COVER	SIZE	ENGLISH	SPANISH	BI-LINGUAL
Catholic Book Publishing	Leatherette	7.25" x 10.25"	34.00		
	Leatherette	4.25" x 6.25"	25.00		29.00
Liturgical Press	Hardcover	6" x 9"	59.95	59.95	105.99 (set)
LTP	Leatherette	5.25" x 8"	48.00		68.00
Magnificat	Softcover	4.25" x 5.5"	24.95		
Midwest Theological Forum	Leatherette	7" x 10"	49.95		69.95

Last Rites

The term “last rites” is not used in ASPC. This may be problematic for some. First, many think of Anointing of the Sick as the last rite. However, it is not Anointing but Viaticum that is “the Last Sacrament of the Christian”². ASPC describes, both for the sick in general and for the dying, a process of accompaniment by the Church over the course of multiple visits.³ Except rare occasion when an illness comes on so suddenly there is no warning and death is already imminent, the faithful “should not tolerate the improper practice of delaying the Sacrament [of the Anointing of the Sick].”⁴ Anointing is done as soon as an illness becomes serious.

¹ Information courtesy Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions, 2025

² Catechism of the Catholic Church 1524, title

³ ASPC Chapters I, II, III, and VI and Appendix I; cf. Appendix III (and <https://www.usccb.org/prayers/prayers-death-and-dying>)

⁴ ASPC, 13

The Normal Sequences

For an illness the normal order is:

1. Visits to the Sick (friendly conversation, Celebration of the Word of God, blessing); Penance and Eucharist should be encouraged (even if they are not received on the initial visit) and a catechesis on the Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum should be provided.⁵ Listening is an important part of supporting the sick person and their family and understanding their needs.
2. If the person is separated from the liturgical assembly, provide Communion of the Sick regularly⁶
3. If the illness becomes serious, confer the Anointing of the Sick⁷

For a person in danger of death from any cause (indicated, for example, by a diagnosis of terminal illness even if there are days or weeks of life yet) the normal order, which may flow from the above sequence, is:

1. Penance is offered and encouraged (though not mandatory)
2. In the case of the diagnosis of an illness, or if the illness has worsened, provide the Anointing of the Sick⁸
3. Viaticum (including, if the minister is a Priest and this is also the moment of death (which may be thought of as the end of the “actively dying” stage), the Apostolic Pardon is conferred, ideally during Mass⁹
4. Communion on subsequent days while the person remains in danger of death¹⁰
5. Commendation of the Dying at the moment of death,¹¹ with prayers after death following¹²

Sudden Death

If the process for “danger of death” above was not possible because a sudden illness or other cause unexpectedly placed a person in imminent danger of death (that is, the person is actively dying and the body is shutting down), a Priest uses The Continuous Rite.¹³ And if they might not even survive to the end of the liturgy, then the Emergency Rite¹⁴ is used, which prioritizes the reception of Viaticum over Anointing.

⁵ ASPC 42-45; cf. 260-276

⁶ ASPC 46-63 for clergy; *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass* (2024) (HC) 54-67 for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

⁷ ASPC 64-92

⁸ ASPC 64-92

⁹ ASPC 93-114 for clergy; HC 54, 55, and 68-78 for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion

¹⁰ ASPC 46-63 for clergy; *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass* (2024) (HC) 54-67 for an Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion; cf. Code of Canon Law 921§3

¹¹ ASPC 138-151

¹² ASPC 307-310

¹³ ASPC 115-135

¹⁴ ASPC 316-325

However, these are for exceptional cases. If the person is in the final days before death, but death is neither imminent nor happening immediately, the person has a right to the fuller rites of the Church listed in the prior section. Hospital and parish processes should therefore arrange for calling a Priest before the situation has become emergent, when possible. Then, Viaticum, can be administered by a minister, ordained or lay, as the time draws near and when necessary.

Anointing of the Sick

Only Priests can administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. As before, Deacons and lay ministers cannot administer the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.¹⁵

Pastoral principles to aid Priests in the discernment of whether to administer the Sacrament in specific cases can be found in ASPC 11 (the aged), 12 (children), 14 (an unconscious person), and 15 (when it isn't clear whether the person is alive or dead). If the person has clearly died use Appendix III; they may not be anointed.

Confirmation of Young Children

A child in danger of death receives Confirmation regardless of whether they have reached the age of reason.¹⁶

Viaticum

The faithful are obliged to receive Viaticum.¹⁷ Pastors, and if needed, other priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are obliged to give it.¹⁸

When Deacons or lay ministers give Viaticum, they omit the Apostolic Pardon. A Priest omits the Apostolic Pardon if the moment of death has not arrived.¹⁹ The Apostolic Pardon is not essential to Viaticum.

In the absence of a Priest at the point of death, the Church itself grants the plenary indulgence to the Christian faithful (who have at least the general intention of obtaining the indulgence and who are not excommunicated but are in a state of grace) if they “have been in the habit of reciting some prayers during their lifetime; in such a case, the Church supplies for the three conditions ordinarily required for a plenary indulgence.”²⁰

¹⁵ ASPC 16

¹⁶ *The Order of Confirmation* 11

¹⁷ ASPC 27

¹⁸ *Code of Canon Law* 911

¹⁹ ASPC 106

²⁰ *Manual of Indulgences: Norms and Grants* (2019), pp. 17 and 54

Liturgical Books for Pastoral Care of the Sick and Dying

Rite	Circumstance	Presider		
		Priest	Deacon	Lay Minister
Typical Sequence for the Sick				
Visits to the Sick	Sickness	ASPC Ch I, ASPC App I		ASPC App I
Communion of the Sick	Sickness which keeps a person from receiving communion at church	ASPC Ch I		HC Ch II
Anointing of the Sick	Onset of serious illness	ASPC Ch II	N/A	
Typical Sequence for the Dying				
Viaticum	Danger of death	ASPC Ch III		HC Ch II
Commendation of the Dying	Dying, typically after Viaticum	ASPC Ch VI		
Prayers after Death	Immediately after death	ASPC App III		
If Necessary for Particular Cases				
Penance, Anointing, and Viaticum (or Anointing without Viaticum)	Imminent danger of death	ASPC App IV	N/A	
Confirmation	Danger of death	ASPC Ch V		
Christian Initiation	Near danger of death but able to hear and respond to questions	OCIA III or, in very urgent need, OCIA IV (aka ASPC App II)		OCIA IV (aka ASPC App II)

<i>Order of the Anointing of the Sick and Their Pastoral Care (ASPC, 2026)</i>	
Chapter I	The Visitation and Communion of the Sick
Chapter II	Order of the Anointing of the Sick
Chapter III	Viaticum
Chapter IV	The Order of Offering the Sacraments to a Sick Person Who Is in Imminent Danger of Death
Chapter V	Confirmation in Danger of Death
Chapter VI	The Order of the Commendation of the Dying
Chapter VII	Various Texts to Be Used in the Rites for the Sick
Appendix I	Model Rites for the Visitation of the Sick
Appendix II	Shorter Order of Adult Initiation to Be Used in Near Danger of Death or at the Point of Death
Appendix III	Prayers after Death
Appendix IV	The Emergency Rite of Penance, Viaticum, and Anointing

<i>Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharistic Mystery outside Mass (HC, 2024)</i>	
Chapter I	Holy Communion outside Mass
Chapter II	Administration of Communion and Viaticum to the Sick by an Extraordinary Minister
Chapter III	Various Forms of Worship of the Most Holy Eucharist
Chapter IV	Various Texts to Be Used in Distributing Holy Communion outside Mass and in the Adoration and Procession of the Most Blessed Sacrament
Appendix	Texts with Music

<i>Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA (in Spanish, RICA), 2024)</i>	
Chapter I	Order of the Catechumenate Arranged in Steps
Chapter II	Order of Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age
Chapter III	Simpler Order of Adult Initiation
Chapter IV	Shorter Order of Adult Initiation to Be Used in Near Danger of Death or at the Point of Death
Chapter V	Preparing Adults for Confirmation and the Eucharist Who Were Baptized as Infants and Did Not Receive Catechesis
Chapter VI	Order of Reception into the Full Communion of the Catholic Church of Those Already Validly Baptized
Appendix I	Combined Rites
Appendix II	Acclamations, Hymns, and Chants

Contact

For more information, call the Office of Worship at (916) 733-0211.