

Letter from Bishop Richard Gagnon - World Day of the Sick

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012, the Feast Day of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Universal Church celebrates **World Day of the Sick**. This day, established twenty years ago, is a day set aside to recognize the reality of those who are ill within our families and communities and the responsibility for each of us to be in solidarity with the vulnerable and those in need. It is also a good day to recall our Church's teaching on the Christian meaning of suffering and Christ's ever abiding presence among us as the Lord who heals, comforts and saves: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest*". (Matt. 11:28) Jesus desires us to link our crosses to his cross as he is gentle and humble of heart and we will find rest for our souls: "*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" (Matt. 11:29) Through our Faith in Christ and participating in his Pascal Mystery, we become open to the grace of God in our needs and sufferings and sharers in his redemptive work both in our personal holiness and in the offering of our crosses and prayers for the good of others.

This day is also a good opportunity to acknowledge the important contributions of all those who directly care for the sick and the elderly, whether in Catholic hospitals and health care facilities, public hospitals or at home. To care for the sick, the elderly in any capacity, as a health professional or as a volunteer from the parish community is to participate in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ.

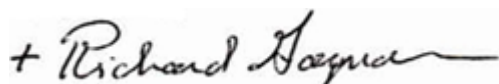
This year, the Church draws our attention to the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and its special contribution in assisting the sick and the elderly in their need. Pope Benedict XVI reminds us that this Sacrament is not a minor Sacrament but one which deserves greater consideration today because of its spiritual benefits to the sick and the elderly. The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick is not only for those at the point of death but also for those who are seriously ill or advanced in years. The elderly, in fact, should be encouraged to be anointed once per year. The Rite of Anointing for both the ill and the elderly may be done by the priest on an individual basis or within the celebration of a liturgical service where more may receive the anointing.

This is also the time to recall that there are two Sacraments of Healing in the Catholic Church - the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick and the Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession. These two Sacraments spiritually complement one another and should be connected whenever possible because the spiritual and psychological burdens of despair and discouragement can be transformed into a moment of Grace and inner strength. The Holy Father reminds us in his letter for the World Day of the Sick that the use of blessed olive oil in the Sacrament of the Anointing recalls the "*double mystery of the Mount of Olives as the location of the olive grove that was the Garden of Gethsemane - both the place where Our Lord confronted his Passion as well as the place where he Ascended into Glory. Oil thus acts as God's medicine offering strength and consolation, yet at the same time pointing beyond the moment of illness toward the definitive healing, the resurrection*". This year then, let us recognize afresh, the importance of these Sacraments of Healing as important spiritual gifts given to Christ's Church. ...

How can you help? Firstly, it is vitally important that an atmosphere of prayer continue in our parishes not only for those in need, but also for those directly ministering to the sick and the elderly. Secondly, be proactive and let your parish know of individuals who are in hospitals, nursing homes or shut-ins at home, so that they may be visited by representatives of the parish. Finally, become a parish volunteer yourself ... or serve as a part of the parish outreach team.

In conclusion, I wish to extend my prayers and support to all of our clergy and volunteers who form the core of parish pastoral outreach in our Diocese and to acknowledge with gratitude all that our health care professionals, both within our Catholic institutions and outside them, do for the care of our people.

Yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Richard Gagnon,
Bishop of Victoria

