# Pastoral Visitor’s Handbook

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The Ministry of Pastoral Care to the Sick and Homebound
Saint Patrick Parish
Nine Pomeworth Street
Stoneham, MA 02180
Welcome!

Welcome to the Ministry of Pastoral Visitation to the Sick and the Homebound!

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Mt 25:40)

This booklet is designed to assist you as you participate in the Ministry of Pastoral Visitation to the Sick and the Homebound at Saint Patrick Parish.

Your willingness to serve as a Pastoral Visitor reflects not only your response to your Baptismal call to serve the people of God, but a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as you proclaim, by your service, the credibility and actuality of the Gospel texts. You share in Christ’s loving ministry to his people as you visit with and/or offer the Eucharist to members of our parish community. You recognize the Body of Christ in those with whom you visit and, ultimately, you act as the Body of Christ by your full participation in the life of the parish and the wider Catholic community through your service in this ministry. Preparing properly for your service, maintaining a regular schedule of at least monthly visits, and being willing to accept additional people to your schedule on a temporary basis, further reflects that commitment.

Once trained and commissioned in this ministry, you will come to understand that you have accepted the awesome privilege of serving the Mystical Body of Christ in a very specific, personal, and loving way.

God bless your efforts!

General Ministry Information

Saint Patrick Parish provides pastoral visits to the homebound and also to Life Care Center, Arnold House, and Fuller House, congregate living centers within the parish boundaries. Ministry volunteers act as compassionate visitors, offering a vital pastoral link between the Parish and the sick or the homebound. Parishioners responding to the call to serve in this Ministry are specifically trained in a series of classes offered through the Archdiocese.

Service in this ministry is designated only for this parish. Pastoral Visitors should not take it upon themselves to bring Communion to a parent, family member, friend or neighbor. If you are aware of someone who could benefit from a pastoral visit, please inform the Coordinator of Pastoral Visitation to the Sick and Homebound.

Family members of a homebound parishioner may be trained specifically to bring Eucharist on a weekly basis to a homebound loved one.
All persons serving in the Pastoral Visitation Ministry must complete a formal application, which includes a CORI (Criminal Offender Record Inquiry), a Parish Volunteer Code of Conduct form, and a Confidentiality Statement, by which the person agrees to honor and maintain confidentiality in all matters pertaining to the role of Parish Pastoral Visitor.

Pastoral Visitor Volunteers are required to attend the 6 week Pastoral Care to the Sick and the Homebound Workshop offered through the Archdiocese of Boston. The Coordinator of Pastoral Visitations will help identify opportunities for attending this course.

Volunteers will also attend a Protecting God’s Children Workshop, which is a one-time, three-hour course required for all employees and volunteers in the Archdiocese of Boston.

In addition, volunteers will meet for an interview with the Coordinator of Pastoral Visitation. During the interview, you will discuss the current needs of the Parish and the areas in which you believe you would be the most effective, (e.g. visiting the homebound or visiting in a nursing center).

When training is completed, the Coordinator of Pastoral Visitation will determine and discuss with you the role which best matches you with parish needs.

Prepare to visit the sick and homebound by praying, planning and trying to place distractions aside. Remember, God is an active presence and participant in any interaction that occurs between you and the person(s) you visit.

A day or two before your plan to visit, call and make arrangements for the visit and be faithful to the day and time you set. Try to neither overstay your visit nor end it prematurely. If uncertain, you can ask “Are you tired?” Sometimes it is helpful to state at the beginning of the visit: “I can spend ___ minutes with you today.” Work on building a relationship; invite sharing of personal history and inquire as to the person’s well-being.

Some suggestions to keep in mind include:

- Use the person’s name.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Be comfortable with silence.
- Remain focused on the person.
- Use gentle touch, when appropriate.
- Use good eye contact. Place yourself in direct line of vision, sitting if possible.
- Practice active listening; acknowledge feelings and information that are shared with you.
- Be comfortable with accepting negative feelings or strong emotions.
- Avoid arguing, showing shock, or aggressively probing or ignoring another’s boundaries.
• Provide reassurance but do not make unrealistic promises and do not become overly focused on medical conditions.
• Do not exchange any medical information or offer examples from your own experience.
• Avoid giving advice, promising to fill special requests, and offering to solve problems.
• If a person is in a hospital or nursing center and is requesting food or water or some type of physical assistance, **ALWAYS** check with a staff person before assisting.
• The question of accepting money from the person you visit may arise. When you are visiting a homebound person for the purposes of pastoral visiting or to bring Eucharist, you are doing so as a **VOLUNTEER**, representing Saint Patrick Parish, and therefore, you should **never accept money** for yourself. If the person is insistent, tell them you are going to give the money to the Church, and after the visit, bring the donation to the rectory office.
• Please notify the coordinator of Pastoral Visitation if you plan to stop your ministry for any reason, such as vacation, sickness, or "retirement." It is important for the parish to provide continuous pastoral care to the person(s) or congregate living center you visit.

**Believe in the value of what you are doing. It does make a difference!**

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**Transporting the Eucharist**

The Blessed Sacrament is carried in a small closed container called a **pyx**. It is recommended that you purchase your own pyx, if possible. If you will be visiting a nursing facility with a large number of residents, a large pyx is available for you to borrow from the parish at the time of your visit. During training, the Coordinator of the Pastoral Visitation Ministry will show you where the large pyx is stored.

When carrying the Blessed Sacrament, be careful to place the pyx in a safe spot. You may place the pyx in a small bag with a string, called a burse, and wear it around your neck or you may put it in your pocket or pocketbook. If you do that, you should be careful to place it alone, rather than in a cluttered area. Do not leave it unattended.

When transporting the Eucharist, you should go directly to the person(s) to whom you will be bringing communion and not let other activities distract you from your ministry (e.g., to go shopping or tend to errands).

**Never** bring the Host home or to work to save time before going to a visit later in the day or later in the week.
**Bringing Eucharist from Mass**

If you will bring the Eucharist to a sick or homebound parishioner after attending Mass, leave the pyx by the Tabernacle for the Priest or Deacon to fill during the Mass. Before Mass, open the pyx and place it on the apron of the Tabernacle. If you need more than one host, put a small piece of paper with the pyx indicating the number of Hosts desired.

After Communion, one of the ministers will place the Host(s) in the pyx, close it and leave it on the apron for you to pick up after the conclusion of Mass.

*Please do not take the Host(s) from the Tabernacle before attending Mass to save time.*

**Acquiring the Eucharist Outside of Mass**

Eucharist for the sick and the homebound is reserved in the tall ciborium in the Tabernacle in the Lower Sacristy. These hosts are somewhat smaller and thinner than the hosts normally offered at Mass so that they may dissolve more quickly and be swallowed more easily. During your training, you will learn the specific key to use to open the Tabernacle and where it is stored.

Go to the Tabernacle, unlock and open it, genuflect or bow deeply, take the ciborium containing the Eucharist for the sick and homebound and place the desired number in your pyx. Return the ciborium to the Tabernacle, then close and lock the Tabernacle door. Put your pyx in a safe place and always check to be sure the Tabernacle door is closed and locked before you leave. Be sure to return the key to where you found it before heading to your visit(s).

Please remember you are carrying the Blessed Sacrament and attending to the business of the Lord so if you meet someone, you want to smile and greet your neighbor, but be careful about stopping and engaging in a long conversation. Use your good judgment!

Bring any unused Hosts back to the Tabernacle after you have finished your visit(s).
At Saint Patrick Parish, we currently use the *Communion of the Sick* booklet to conduct pastoral visits and offer Holy Eucharist. The Coordinator of the Pastoral Visitation Ministry will provide you with a copy of this booklet and will instruct you in its proper use.

The protocol for offering Eucharist to the homebound consists of the following, as outlined in the booklet:

- Greeting
- Penitential rite
- A short reading from Scripture, optionally followed by an associated reflection, provided in the booklet
- Intercessory prayers
- The Lord’s Prayer
- Reception of Communion
- A prayer after Communion
- A blessing

When you distribute Eucharist in the home or in a hospital or nursing center, you should follow the Rites outlined in the *Communion of the Sick* booklet, using the prayers, readings, and reflections provided for *Ordinary Circumstances* or *In a Hospital or Institution* setting, depending on the person you are visiting.

On certain occasions, you will be asked to bring blessed sacramentals to the people you visit.

**Ash Wednesday:**

Ashes will be available in the lower sacristy after the first service on Ash Wednesday morning. To carry the amount of ashes you will need, you may use a small jar (e.g., a baby food jar or a very small jam jar).

To administer the ashes, dip your thumb into the ashes and make the sign of the cross on the person’s forehead while saying either: “*Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel*” or “*Remember, you are dust and to dust you will return.*” Be sure to wash your hands after administering the ashes.

**Palm Sunday:**

Blessed palm is put aside for distribution to the sick and homebound. You may pick it up in the lower sacristy after the Mass you attend on Palm Sunday.
The Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick

After the 12:00 noon Mass each Sunday, the parish offers the opportunity for those parishioners who are scheduled for surgery later in the week or feel a special need for God’s healing power to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick. After the closing hymn, those requesting Anointing of the Sick approach the altar in the upper church, where the priest will meet them for the sacrament. The prayers of the ritual of anointing are geared for the person’s physical health and spiritual healing.

In addition, each Spring, the parish sets aside a weekend when the priests will invite parishioners who are sick, elderly, or facing surgery to come forward after each of the weekend Masses to receive Anointing of the Sick.

Our parish priests are also happy to visit the homebound, hospitalized, or residents of congregate living centers to offer the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick at the request of the patient or a family member. In emergency situations, priests are available outside of rectory office hours via the rectory phone answering system.

If one of the persons you visit requests or has a family member request Anointing of the Sick, please call the rectory office and inform them that the person requests a visit from a priest for the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick.

Additional Resources

Handbook for Ministers of Care, 2nd Ed.
Genevieve Glen, OSB, Marilyn Kofler, SP and Kevin O’Connor, Liturgy Training Publications 1997

The Art of Being a Healing Presence
James Miller, Willowgreen Inc. 2010

Visiting the Sick
Patti Normille, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1991

The Joy of Being a Eucharistic Minister
Mitch Finley, Resurrection Press 1998

Compassionate Caring for the Sick and Dying
Sara Arline Thrash, Twenty-third Publications 2000

A Thoughtful Word, A Healing Touch
Joseph M. Champlin and Susan Champlin Taylor Twenty-Third Publications 1995

Praying With the Sick
Sandra DeGidio, OSM, Twenty-Third Publications 1998
You are my hope, Lord;  
my trust, God,  
from my youth.  
On you I depend since birth;  
from my mother’s womb  
you are my strength;  
my hope in you never wavers.

Psalm 71:5-6

Dear Lord,
please let me complete my visits  
with joy and with compassion.  
Let me bring your light to those who  
may be experiencing darkness and despair today.  
Help me to be fully present to each person I visit,  
listening with care and concern, and  
offering openness and humor when appropriate.  
Let me speak words of comfort and encouragement  
and may my actions be thoughtful and loving.  
May my hands, my feet, my heart and my lips  
be used in total service to those I visit today  
and may I bring to them,  
the same care and concern that I would want  
if I were in their place.  
Thank you for allowing me to serve you, Lord, and  
bring you praise through these visits.

Amen.

Saint Patrick Parish
Pastoral Assistant  
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