

Archbishop Smith: World Day of the Sick

Every year on February 11th, feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Church marks the World Day of the Sick. In our churches around the world we offer prayers to Almighty God for healing of those suffering from disease. This day is also an occasion to thank God for the gift of Catholic healthcare, and to ask his blessing upon the countless thousands of people who work or volunteer in our facilities.



The Grey Nuns Community Hospital in Southeast Edmonton. Lincoln Ho,
Grandin Media

In Alberta, we owe the beginning of our own provincial hospital system to communities of Catholic Sisters who gave of themselves heroically to establish good quality healthcare, especially for the poor and most vulnerable. Continuing to build upon their foundation today is Covenant Health. Fully integrated into the provincial system of healthcare delivery, it operates seventeen sites in twelve communities, all under the sponsorship of Catholic Health of Alberta. Globally, the Catholic Church manages approximately one-fourth of the world's healthcare facilities, and is the largest non-governmental provider of healthcare worldwide. Healing, both physical and, above all, spiritual, was central to the mission of Jesus. It remains at the heart of the Church's ministry.

We ask God to bless the work of our physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and other

healthcare workers, as well as those who serve through governance, administration and general support. We pray, too, for the chaplains who accompany the infirm with spiritual consolation; for the many priests who, while attending to their parochial duties, are also on-call day and night to respond to urgent sacramental needs; and for the numerous parishioners who volunteer to visit the sick and home-bound with Holy Communion.



The Misericordia Hospital in Edmonton is a Covenant Health facility. Lincoln Ho, Grandin Media

Implicit within the variety of activity, there is one common message that everyone involved in Catholic healthcare brings to any sick person entrusted to our care. It is, in the words we heard from St. Paul on Sunday, "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve" (1Cor. 15: 3-5). In other words, we carry to the infirm the sure conviction that Jesus, whose healing of the sick foreshadowed his definitive victory over sin and death, remains with us always and calls us to surrender our weakness and need to the power of his love and mercy.

Finally, this day is an occasion for all of us to reflect upon our own spiritual health. In his 2019 Message for World Day of the Sick, Pope Francis praises the selfless generosity of those who volunteer in healthcare, and then turns the focus upon our own condition with this striking statement: "The joy of generous giving is a barometer of the health of a Christian." The good health of a Christian disciple is shown in selfless concern for others; the

need for healing of the soul is manifest when we live only for ourselves.

As we bring Christ's healing to the infirm, may his grace be a remedy as well for our own spiritual debility. As the Lord himself said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Luke 5:31) In one way or another, that's all of us. We find our healer in Christ.