



Canonical Directives in Time of Crisis Issued 3-24-2020

During this time of a world-wide health emergency due to COVID-19, the Coronavirus, the following might be helpful to you in your priestly ministry. The fundamental principle of our Church's law is the salvation of souls. We need to find appropriate ways now to make the sacraments available to God's people, especially to those who are sick and dying.

Penance: When the Sacrament of Penance is celebrated individually, care should be taken to provide enough safe distance between the priest and the penitent. The best place to celebrate this sacrament in the present health crisis is outside the small confines of the confessional. If necessary, masks may be worn.

As with all the sacraments, the Sacrament of Penance must be celebrated where there is a mutual, physical presence between the priest and the penitent. Thus, confessions may never be heard over the phone or online.

General Absolution: The Holy See has recently highlighted the possibility of the use of general absolution in certain circumstances of grave necessity during the current health crisis. For general absolution to be received validly, the faithful must always have the intention to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance individually and to confess their grave sins at a future time. General absolution can always be administered to a large group of the faithful when there is an immediate danger of death and not enough priests are available to hear individual confessions. It can also be administered when there is a "grave necessity" and because of the large number of penitents and few priests, individual confessions cannot be heard in a proper amount of time. The Holy See has now stated that in the current health crisis and under certain circumstances, this "grave necessity" can be met. Such circumstances of grave necessity within the Diocese of Green Bay are as follows:

- a) *In hospitals, nursing homes, or other health care facilities where large numbers of the faithful are gravely ill with Covid-19*
 - b) *In houses of religious institutes, where many of the members are gravely ill with Covid-19.*
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<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320d.html>

Because the faithful may not currently gather in parish churches above the number of ten, the need for the use of general absolution in such parish circumstances does not exist.

Given public restrictions, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance with either individual or general absolution may not be possible. This will make some of the faithful anxious, especially during this Lenten season of penance.

To assure the consciences of the faithful, the Holy See, through the Apostolic Penitentiary, has offered two additional recourses for the faithful:

- a) Where the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that an act of perfect contrition obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones.

Perfect contrition requires:

- *the love of God*
- *the sincere desire for forgiveness*
- *the ardent commitment to receive the sacrament of reconciliation when available*

- b) The gift of a special Indulgence has been granted to the faithful suffering from COVID-19 disease, commonly known as Coronavirus, as well as to health care workers, family members and all those who in any capacity, including through prayer, care for them.

• Specifically, a Plenary Indulgence has been granted to the faithful suffering from Coronavirus, who are subject to quarantine by order of the health authority in hospitals or in their own homes if, with a spirit detached from any sin, they unite spiritually through the media to the celebration of Holy Mass, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, to the pious practice of the Way of the Cross or other forms of devotion, or if at least they will recite the Creed, the Lord's Prayer and a pious invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, offering this trial in a spirit of faith in God and charity towards their brothers and sisters, with the will to fulfil the usual conditions (sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion and prayer according to the Holy Father's intentions), as soon as possible.

• Also, health care workers, family members and all those who, following the example of the Good Samaritan, expose themselves to the risk of contagion while caring for those sick with the Coronavirus will obtain the same gift of a Plenary Indulgence under the same conditions.

<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2020/03/20/200320c.html>

Anointing of the Sick:

This sacrament is to be celebrated by those who are seriously ill or frail due to illness or age and where death becomes a possibility.

Because of the risk of contagion, gloves can be worn or an instrument can be used to administer the oil of the sick. If it is not possible to anoint either the person's forehead or hands, any part of the person's body can be anointed.

Eucharist:

While the Church rightly has advocated for frequent reception of Holy Communion, there are times when the Eucharist cannot be received because of grave reasons such as the present health crisis. Indeed, the faithful are only obliged to receive the Eucharist once a year, during the Easter season.

Also, pastoral care should be exercised lest the reception of Holy Communion become separated from the celebration of the Mass.

The combining of Mass intentions is carefully regulated because of the danger of simony or the appearance of trafficking in Mass intentions. Mass intentions may only be combined twice a week, and only with the explicit permission of those who requested each Mass. Only one stipend of ten dollars can be retained by the parish, the rest must be sent to the Leo Benevolent Association. Mass intentions left unsaid can be fulfilled at a later date.

Baptism:

Baptism is the principle sacrament of salvation and in immediate danger of death, should never be delayed. If baptisms have been delayed for any reason, such as because of the Lenten season, they should now be celebrated when requested and without undue delay, especially if the person is sick.

Confirmation:

Priests have the faculty to Confirm any baptized person, even an infant, when there is an immediate danger of death.

Regularly scheduled Confirmations will be celebrated at a future date.

Please contact me directly at jgirotti@gbdioc.org if you have any questions about these or other matters.

Fr. John W. Girotti