

GUIDELINES FOR THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The Church is solicitous in calling the faithful to continued conversion and renewal. It desires that the baptized who have sinned should acknowledge their sins against God and their neighbor and have heartfelt repentance for them (Rite of Penance: Decree, 1973).

In the sacrament of penance God achieves and seals a reconciliation brought about in Christ at his initiative through a celebration of forgiveness on a human level (Commentary on the Rite of Penance).

In the renewed Rite of Penance, December, 1973, three forms of celebrations are outlined.

The first form, Reconciliation of Individual Penitents, is the normal and ordinary way of celebrating the sacrament, and it should not fall into disuse or be neglected.

The second form, Reconciliation of a Number of Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution, helps to give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the sacrament.

The third form, Reconciliation of a Number of Penitents with General Confession and Absolution, is exceptional in character. It is therefore regulated by a special discipline (Apostolic Exhortation, Reconciliatio et Paenitentia, 1984, cf. 32).

I. Ordinary Celebration of the Sacrament

- A. The sacrament of reconciliation is to be celebrated in the language understood by the people.
- B. Every Church and mission is to have the facility to administer the sacrament of reconciliation "offering the penitent a choice between face-to-face encounter or behind a screen." A reconciliation chapel is to be simple and austere, furnished with a simple cross, table and bible (EACW #81).
- C. The opportunity for individual confession and absolution is to be scheduled in every parish of the diocese on a weekly basis. There should be a time separation between the sacrament of reconciliation time and Mass time.
- D. Communal reconciliation services are encouraged especially during Advent and Lent in each parish. Priests from other parishes are to be invited so that the opportunity for individual confession and absolution is provided.
- E. Priests should be vested in alb and stole.
- F. Suggested formats of communal celebration of reconciliation with individual confession and absolution are provided in the rite.

II. The Reconciliation of Several Penitents with General Confession and Absolution.

The greatest care must be taken to provide the faithful with an adequate catechesis so that they may understand the concept and extraordinary condition of general absolution.

- A. Absolution without prior individual confession cannot be given collectively to a number of penitents unless:
1. The danger of death is eminent and there is no time for a priest to hear the confession of the individual penitents.
 2. A serious need is present; namely, given the number of penitents, not enough confessors are available to hear individual confessions properly within a reasonable time, with the result that through no fault of their own the faithful would be forced to be for a long time without the grace of the sacrament or without Communion. The need in question is not regarded as sufficient when the non-availability of confessors is based solely on there being a large number of penitents such as may be the case at some great festival or pilgrimage (See CIC, canons 960 and 961, paragraph 1 #31).
 - a. The phrase "for a long time" should be understood as a period of one month (NCCB, June, 1988, Collegetown).
- B. It is for the diocesan bishop, and him alone, to judge whether and when the conditions for general absolution are verified in his diocese (canon 961, 2).
- C. In judging whether the conditions for general absolution are verified in his diocese, the diocesan bishop, in light of the criteria agreed upon with the other members of the episcopal conference, can determine cases of grave necessity (canon 961, 2).
- D. Validity of general sacramental absolution.
1. In order to receive validly general sacramental absolution, the penitent must have the usual proper disposition to receive the sacrament; i.e., repentance for sins, intention of refraining from committing them again, and resolution to rectify scandalous injury they have caused. In addition to these dispositions penitents must be resolved "to confess in due time each of those serious sins that they cannot at the present time confess in this way." (no. 33).
 2. Unless prevented by a moral impossibility, the penitent who has received general absolution is to make an individual confession within a year and before receiving general absolution again (no. 34).