

June 24, 2020

Guidelines for the Sacrament of Reconciliation During the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic

“I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” – Matthew 16:19

A. General Principles

1. The health and safety Protocols enumerated in the Guidelines for the Resumption of the Public Masses in the Diocese of Sacramento (May 26, 2020), are also applicable in celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. Physical distancing must be observed at all times without compromising the seal of confession. Distancing guidelines also apply when individuals are waiting for their turn to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
3. Individuals who fall in the vulnerable category, persons 65+ and with compromised health conditions may consider arranging with the priest an alternative time to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
4. It is imperative that priest and penitent wear a mask at all times, while waiting to approach the sacrament and during the actual confession.
5. Priests are to accommodate the need of a penitent to receive the sacrament without compromising both their health and safety.
6. Pastors are asked to provide regularly scheduled hours for confession. Consider morning hours for vulnerable populations.

B. Place of Confession

1. Confessionals that do not accommodate physical distancing and without proper ventilation should not be used and an alternative location must be arranged to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
2. The place of confession must be able to preserve the seal of confession and maintain physical distancing.
3. Provisions should be made for those who wish to make an anonymous confession.
4. Pastors are to establish proper sanitizing procedures when administering the sacrament before, in between confessions, and after confessions are concluded.
5. Precautions must be taken to limit the number of people congregating in a single location such as a church or chapel.
6. When administering the sacrament at a hospital or similar facilities and if the priest is permitted entry, he must diligently follow the Diocesan protocols that have been put in place.
7. The use of cell phones and other technologies are not permitted even if the penitent is in close visual proximity.

C. Priest

1. Refrain from administering the sacrament when exhibiting any of the symptoms of a COVID-19 Virus infection. Priests 65+ must prudently take necessary precautions.
2. Keep the administration of the sacrament as brief as possible.

3. Pastors are to provide instructions regarding the administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in their particular parish. Along with offering regularly scheduled times for confession, priests may present the option to make an appointment for confession in order to accommodate special circumstances due to health or other limitations. Penitents needing counseling in addition to receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation should be offered the option of arranging an appointment in a timely manner with the priest.

D. Penitent

1. Penitents are to wear masks before, during, and after confessions. They should be provided the means to properly sanitize themselves before and after confession.