



Decree Establishing Sacramental Penance Directives During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In accord with Canon 223 (CIC), in order to promote the common good of the Clergy and Faithful of the Diocese of Yakima during the state and national emergencies declared by civil authorities due to the global COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic, I, the Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson, Bishop of Yakima, state the following:

WHEREAS:

In his March 20, 2020 homily, Pope Francis called to mind the teachings of the Catholic Church regarding Perfect Contrition with the following words:

“When the individual faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by votum confessionis, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452).”

AND WHEREAS:

It is becoming increasingly difficult for priests of the Diocese of Yakima to provide the Sacrament of Reconciliation due to: local, state and federal directives and guidelines from civil authorities regarding public gatherings; limits placed on visitors to hospitals; limits placed on persons who are confirmed to have the coronavirus, or who are in self-isolation awaiting test results; and, the age and health concerns of a great number of priests of the Diocese of Yakima.

THEREFORE, I DECREE THE FOLLOWING SACRAMENTAL PENANCE DIRECTIVES AS PARTICULAR LAW WITHIN THE DIOCESE OF YAKIMA:

First: With regards to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation:

- Parishioners are encouraged make an act of “perfect contrition” now and then seek the Sacrament of Reconciliation later after the coronavirus pandemic has ebbed.
- Priests serving in the Diocese of Yakima over the age of 60 should not celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with individual parishioners.
- Priests serving in the Diocese of Yakima under the age of 60 with significant health challenges also should not celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with individual parishioners (see page three for a list of some conditions that would apply).
- Other priests should limit the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation only by appointment according to the following strict health norms:

- celebration in a ventilated place outside the confessional;
- adoption of a suitable distance;
- outside of a hospital setting, only with those who have no cold- or flu-like symptoms;
- in a hospital setting, use of protective masks following the directions of medical personnel;
- absolute attention to safeguarding the sacramental seal and necessary discretion.

If any of the above four conditions cannot be met, then the priest can assist the parishioner with catechesis to make an act of “perfect contrition” over the phone, or in another suitable manner. Again, from CCC 1452, the elements are:

- When the contrition arises from a love by which God is loved above all else;
- When there is the sincere desire for forgiveness;
- When it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as reasonably possible.

Second, with regards to General (Collective) Absolution

- Priests serving in the Diocese of Yakima may give general absolution to groups of those who are gravely ill or dying, when individual confession is not possible: particularly in the case of those who have been diagnosed with, or quarantined because of, the coronavirus, as well their caregivers. They should stand at an appropriate social distance from the hospital building, ward or room entrance, using the words of absolution as audibly as possible for penitents to hear. When possible, first invite those receiving absolution to make an Act of Contrition, if only silently in their hearts.
- While the note suggests this may take place at hospitals, in many cases this general absolution would also apply to parishioners’ homes where the caregivers are family members and the person gravely ill or dying is at home with their loved ones and the priest cannot enter due to a quarantine or self-isolation order.
- Survivors and caregivers who receive general absolution are obliged to confess any mortal sins they have been forgiven of within a reasonable amount of time, once the coronavirus danger has passed, in the individual celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and most certainly within one year (*Ordo Paenitentiae*, n. 34).
- If general absolution is given, priests are obligated to advise the bishop of the circumstances as soon as is reasonably possible (*Ordo Paenitentiae*, n. 32).

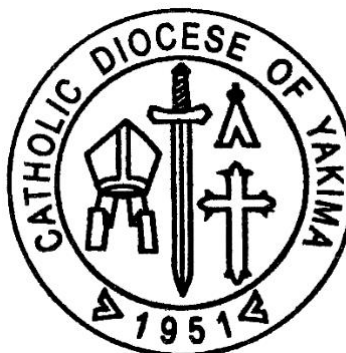
These directives will remain in force in the Diocese of Yakima until partially or fully revoked.

Given this day, March 22, 2020, at the Pastoral Center of the Diocese of Yakima.



Most Rev. Joseph J. Tyson
Bishop of Yakima

[signature electronically applied]



Underlying medical conditions that may increase the risk of serious COVID-19 for individuals of any age.

Blood disorders (e.g., sickle cell disease or on blood thinners)

Chronic kidney disease as defined by your doctor. Patient has been told to avoid or reduce the dose of medications because kidney disease, or is under treatment for kidney disease, including receiving dialysis

Chronic liver disease as defined by your doctor. (e.g., cirrhosis, chronic hepatitis) Patient has been told to avoid or reduce the dose of medications because liver disease or is under treatment for liver disease.

Compromised immune system (immunosuppression) (e.g., seeing a doctor for cancer and treatment such as chemotherapy or radiation, received an organ or bone marrow transplant, taking high doses of corticosteroids or other immunosuppressant medications, HIV or AIDS)

Current or recent pregnancy in the last two weeks

Endocrine disorders (e.g., diabetes mellitus)

Metabolic disorders (such as inherited metabolic disorders and mitochondrial disorders)

Heart disease (such as congenital heart disease, congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease)

Lung disease including asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (chronic bronchitis or emphysema) or other chronic conditions associated with impaired lung function or that require home oxygen

Neurological and neurologic and neurodevelopment conditions [including disorders of the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerve, and muscle such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy (seizure disorders), stroke, intellectual disability, moderate to severe developmental delay, muscular dystrophy, or spinal cord injury].