



GUIDANCE FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE

DURING THE COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC FROM 4TH JULY 2020

DIOCESE OF LEEDS

1. Introduction

The Sacrament of Penance (Sacrament of Reconciliation) requires the one-to-one encounter between a priest and the penitent. As such, this must be conducted so that the integrity and confidentiality of the Sacrament is maintained and in as safe a way as possible during the continuing period of risk resulting from the Covid-19 Coronavirus Pandemic.

2. Principles to Stop Viral Infection

The principles used to stop the transmission of the viral infection during the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance are:

- preventing exhaled droplet spread between penitent and priest through physical distance or barriers, or positioning; and,
- by means of cleaning and hygiene, preventing the spread of infection between penitents using the same kneeler or chair, and by cleaning surfaces that are touched frequently (e.g. the top of the kneeler).

3. Confessions Outdoors

Confession outdoors is permitted. Social distancing should be observed for this and good hygiene through cleaning surfaces frequently touched by penitents should be ensured. Placing the penitent and priest at right angles to each other or back to back would further reduce air spread containing droplets between them. Asking penitents to sanitise their hands when arriving is a sensible step.

4. Confession inside churches or buildings

Within a church, if the church environment allows for confession to take place in an open space (such as a side chapel or other private area), this is preferred. If possible, the priest and the penitent should not sit face-to-face but at right angles to each other or side-by-side, facing opposite directions, whilst still allowing for the spoken matter of the confession to be heard. Penitents should have sanitised their hands when entering the church as part of existing measures.

- It may be possible to place a plastic or glass screen between the priest and the penitent which would allow for a face-to-face encounter. If so, the screen should be made of a solid material.

- If a grille is used, a cloth curtain (or a piece of plastic film) should be placed over the priest's side to minimise transmission risk.
- If a chair or a kneeler is used for the penitent, the touchpoints (where the penitent has touched with their hands) should be cleaned with household detergent after each penitent; it may make things easier if the penitent were able to stand whilst making their confession.

At this time, the use of traditional confessionals should be avoided if possible, due to the restricted airflow within them. However, if they are to be used, traditional 'Roman style' confessionals (penitent kneeling at right angles to the priest speaking through a grille) are best. A plastic film on the priest's side covering the grille will provide a barrier against air droplets. The touchpoints on the kneeler should be cleaned after each penitent. Maximising the airflow through the confessional would be a priority; such as, if possible, leaving the door open.

Above all, priests should ensure that through ensuring the regular cleaning of the points that are touched frequently and the positioning of a barrier between penitent and himself, the risk of virus transmission is minimised.

Priests should limit the number of confessions they hear each day to reduce their exposure risk.

The times of confession, either indoors and/or outdoors, may now be advertised.

Review

These arrangements will be kept under weekly review. When guidance from the Government and from the Bishops' Conference is modified, the Diocesan guidance will be adapted as appropriate.

**✘ Marcus Stock
Bishop of Leeds**

30th June 2020