



ARCHDIOCESE OF CINCINNATI

Office of the Archbishop

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October 29, 2020

Dear Brother Priests,

As we approach the great Solemnity of Christ the King of the Universe and the concurrent end of the liturgical year, I want to thank you for the many examples of creativity, flexibility, and ingenuity which have been evident in your approaches to pastoral ministry and the care of your parishes over the past months. The situation of the pandemic continues to unfold, and it is my hope and prayer that we will pass through the remainder of its course without major incident and with the same sacrificial generosity which has inspired you to find ways to continue to bring the fruitfulness of the sacraments and richness of the Word of God to the people of the Archdiocese. I know this has not been easy.

One of the areas where I have heard of examples of this creativity and missionary spirit is in regard to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Priests have told me about hearing confessions in parking lots, re-working rooms at their parishes to hear confessions while taking social distancing into account, and of making themselves available to hear confessions more often throughout the week.

During the seasons of Advent and Lent, there are typically more opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation to be offered to the people. Many times, this happens during “Communal Penance Services.” The question has been raised as to whether I would consider granting permission for priests to impart general absolution at these communal services since there are concerns about administering the sacrament for large numbers of penitents given the restrictions and precautions associated with the pandemic. While there could be particular cases during the course of the pandemic in which a priest may find himself in such a situation that imparting general absolution according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law and the Rite of Penance would be permissible due to the gravity of the situation and the danger of death, there does not seem to be a general state in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati in which individual confession and absolution are not available to the faithful.

In a decree and consequent explanatory note issued by the Apostolic Penitentiary on March 19, 2020, the Vatican stated that the current pandemic may cause a situation to exist in which granting general absolution to a large number of the faithful would be permissible. They cite the example of a priest who goes to a hospital ward of patients dying of COVID-19 and the inability of the priest to approach the patients individually. In that case they acknowledge that the priest could impart general absolution. A communal penance service hosted by a parish is not the same sort of grave situation. Therefore, I do not authorize general absolution to be imparted at communal penance services.

RADIATE CHRIST

I ask that you and your staff members evaluate the situation at your parish(es) to determine the best course of action for you and your people to safely celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation. If you feel you can conduct a service with multiple priests available to hear individual confessions in a safe and prudent manner, that is entirely permissible. If you feel the best course of action is to forgo a communal penance service and to add additional times for individual confessions to be heard, I commend you for that generosity. If you are going to simply maintain the practices you currently have in place, that is also acceptable. I trust your judgment and thank you for being faithful to this important aspect of our priestly ministry, especially in times that are more challenging for many, many reasons.

Know of my prayers for a fruitful and grace-filled Advent.

Fraternally yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dennis M. Schnurr". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross symbol above the first letter 'D'.

Most Reverend Dennis M. Schnurr
Archbishop of Cincinnati

ljh