

Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

Policy # 120.41

Reconciliation

Approved By: Most Reverend James V. Johnston, Jr.

Effective: November 25, 2024

THE ORDER FOR RECONCILING INDIVIDUAL PENITENTS

- * Before hearing confessions, the priest should call upon the Holy Spirit for assistance (Order of Penance, 15).
- * Although the penitent or the priest may opt for an anonymous confession, parishes should provide confessionals permitting the option of confessing face-to-face, preferably with separation between priest confessor and penitent if in private.
- * The beginning of a confession is described in OP 41-43.
 - * The priest welcomes penitents kindly and greets them with friendly words (OP, 41).
 - * The penitent makes the sign of the cross (OP, 42).
 - * The priest invites the penitent to trust in God (OP, 42).
 - * The priest or the penitent may read a verse from scripture (OP, 17 and 43).
- * In Spanish a confession often begins with the dialogue: *Ave María purísima, Sin pecado concebida*. This is customary but not required.
- * Priests should take care that the faithful are catechized about the beginning of a confession, including children preparing for their first confession.
- * Priests assist those who begin their confession with the traditional formula, “Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.”
- * In English, many penitents inform the priest about the length of time since their last confession. In Spanish, many do not and may not remember if asked. Priests are reminded that the Order of Penance does not require this information.
- * The penitent confesses sins, careful to mention all grave sin (OP, 44; canon 988).
- * If an interpreter assists the penitent, the interpreter is bound to the same secrecy as the priest (canons 983, §2 and 990).
- * The priest may help the penitent make an integral confession, offer counsel, urge true contrition, and remind the penitent that the sacrament helps them participate in the dying and rising of Christ (OP, 44).
- * In Spanish and English, some penitents use the confessional for spiritual advice or lamentation. Some will go into detail about the events leading up to a sin. Priests give appropriate counsel but may recommend a time to meet outside the confessional.
- * All penitents are to confess regularly and make a sincere determination to avoid future sin.
- * The priest proposes a work of penance to assist with the penitent’s amending of life (OP, 44). In the hispanic community, some penitents expect a large penance for large sins.
- * A penitent unsure of being able to fulfill the penance may request another.
- * The penitent may use any option for the Prayer of the Penitent (the Act of Contrition)—those in the Order of Penance (45, 85-92), one having been memorized, or one offered spontaneously.
- * The priest offers absolution, careful to use all the words and only the words of the approved formula. He extends his hands, or at least his right hand, until making the sign of the cross at the end (OP, 46).
- * The priest initiates a proclamation of praise of God and dismisses the penitent, using the formulas at OP 47 or 93.
- * Parishes are to publish scheduled times for the sacrament of reconciliation.

- * Since 1967, “the faithful should be encouraged to approach the Sacrament of Penance at a time when Mass is not being celebrated, especially during the scheduled times” (OP 13); thus hearing confessions during Mass is discouraged. Hearing confessions during exposition of the Blessed Sacrament is not ideal or often practical, especially during Holy Hours. Each liturgy has its own integrity, and the faithful are expected to participate in them fully, consciously and actively.
- * Parishes should offer regular catechesis on the sacrament of reconciliation.

THE ORDER FOR RECONCILING SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH INDIVIDUAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

- * The Order for Reconciling Several Penitents, often called a communal penance service, shows more clearly the ecclesial nature of reconciliation. The faithful listen together to the Word of God, which proclaims his mercy and invites them to conversion. At the same time, they examine how their lives conform with the Word of God, and they help one another through common prayer. After each person has confessed his or her sins and received absolution, all praise God together for his wonderful deeds on behalf of the people he has gained for himself through the blood of his Son (OP, 22).
- * This order is particularly fitting during Advent and Lent. It may also be used effectively with small groups. It may be celebrated with adult members of the parish community as well as with children—for example, in retreat situations, for staff days in parishes, groups of teachers and/or children in schools. Examples of penitential services in OP Appendix II may inspire those who prepare the order of service for such groups.
- * This order requires proper liturgical preparation. Its use requires the presence of a sufficient number of confessors so that individual, private and auricular confession and individual absolution are always expeditiously employed. In many parishes, multi-lingual confessors should also be available, having advised the people in advance.
- * The Order of Penance, with its appendices, should be used as the liturgical book instead of a printed handout or worship aid.
- * The physical arrangements should permit individuals to approach confessors with complete assurance of privacy. In setting up temporary stations, attention is to be given to acoustics so as to maintain privacy.
- * A proclamation of the Word of God is integral to the rite, and therefore always to be included. Readings of the Word of God are included in OP 101-201. Hymns and psalms such as those offered in the Order, or others with similar themes from approved collections, are to be sung.
- * This Order appropriately provides the penitents with an extended period for private examination in silence, or led by a priest, reader, or other liturgical minister. Examples of an examination of conscience may be found in OP Appendix III.
- * Soft instrumental music is an appropriate way of maintaining a prayerful atmosphere. It is desirable that at least one station, and ideally all stations, afford penitents the opportunity for anonymity.
- * Some penitents, especially in the hispanic community, may require catechesis that they do not repeat the act of contrition while giving their individual confession.
- * When using this Order, absolution is always to be given individually.

THE ORDER FOR RECONCILING SEVERAL PENITENTS WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

- * The Order including general confession and absolution is, by its very nature, extraordinary. While the liturgical structure is similar to the previous Order, there are two significant differences:
 - * There is no private confession of sins.
 - * The penitents receive absolution not individually but as a group.
 - * “After the Homily, or in the Homily itself, the faithful who wish to receive general absolution should be instructed that they should be properly disposed, that is, each one should repent of his (her) transgressions and resolve to abstain from these sins, to intend to make reparation for any scandal and harm he (she) may have caused, and also to resolve to confess individually at the proper time each of the grave sins that cannot now be confessed.” (OP 60)
- * In view of the many opportunities to approach confessors in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph and since the Conference of Catholic Bishops in December 1989 proclaimed the interpretation and the meaning of *diu* of canon 961, §1, 2° to be "one month" (<https://www.usccb.org/committees/canonical-affairs-church-governance/complementary-norms>), the bishop does not envision any use of this Order and does not grant permission for it.
- * Clearly, too, this Order cannot be used, for example, when the Order For Reconciling Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution (a communal penance service) is prepared, but the number of confessors present is insufficient to complete the liturgy in a timely way.
- * In cases of true life and death emergency, a priest has authority to offer general absolution.