

PENANCE

The Father has shown forth his mercy by reconciling the world to himself in Christ and by making peace for all things on earth and in heaven by the blood of Christ on the cross. The Son of God made man lived among us in order to free us from the slavery of sin and to call us out of darkness into his wonderful light. He therefore began his work on earth by preaching repentance and saying: "Repent and believe in the Gospel." (Mark 1:15)

Jesus... not only exhorted people to repentance so that they would abandon their sins and turn wholeheartedly to the Lord, but welcoming sinners, he actually reconciled them with the Father... Therefore, on the night he was betrayed and began his saving passion, he instituted the sacrifice of the New Covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins. After his resurrection he sent the Holy Spirit upon the apostles, empowering them to forgive or retain sins and sending them forth to all peoples to preach repentance and the forgiveness of sins in his name. (Rite of Penance Introduction 1)

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Celebration of the Sacrament

1. Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary means by which a member of the faithful conscious of grave sin is reconciled with God and the Church. Only physical or moral impossibility excuses from confession of this type. (c. 960)

Proper Place

1. The proper place to hear sacramental confession is a church or oratory. (c. 964, §1)
2. Provision must be made in each church or oratory for a sufficient number of places for sacramental confessions which are clearly visible, truly accessible, and which provide a fixed grille between the penitent and the confessor. Provision should be made for penitents who wish to confess face-to-face... (U.S. Bishops' *Complementary Norm, Canon 964, §2*, effective December 1, 2000)
3. Confessions may be heard outside a confessional for a just cause. (c. 964, §3)

Minister of the Sacrament of Penance

1. The Church exercises the ministry of the sacrament of penance through bishops and priests. By preaching God's word they call the faithful to conversion; in the name of Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit they declare and grant the forgiveness of sins. (*Rite of Penance 9*)

2. Those who possess the faculty of hearing confessions habitually whether by virtue of office or by virtue of the grant of an ordinary of the place or incardination or of the place in which they have domicile, can exercise the faculty everywhere unless the local ordinary has denied it in a particular case. (c. 967, §2)
3. Even though a priest lacks the faculty to hear confessions, he absolves validly and licitly any penitents whatsoever in danger of death from any censures and sins, even if an approved priest is present. (c. 976)
4. The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore it is absolutely forbidden for a confessor to betray in any way a penitent in words or in any manner for any reason. (c. 983, §1)
5. A confessor is prohibited completely from using knowledge acquired from confession to the detriment of the penitent even when any danger of revelation is excluded. (c. 984, §1)
6. Pastoral exercise of this ministry (from the *Rite of Penance* 10):
 - a. In order that he may fulfill his ministry properly and faithfully, understands the disorders of souls and apply the appropriate remedies to them, and act as a wise judge, the confessor must acquire the needed knowledge and prudence by constant study under the guidance of the Church's magisterium and especially by praying fervently to God. For the discernment of spirits is indeed a deep knowledge of God's working in the human heart, a gift of the Spirit, and an effect of charity.
 - b. The confessor should always show himself to be ready and willing to hear the confessions of the faithful whenever they reasonably request this.
 - c. By receiving repentant sinners and leading them to the light of the truth, the confessor fulfills a paternal function: he reveals the heart of the Father and reflects the image of Christ the Good Shepherd. He should keep in mind that he has been entrusted with the ministry of Christ, who accomplished the saving work of human redemption by mercy and by his power is present in the sacraments.
7. In posing questions, the priest is to proceed with prudence and discretion, attentive to the condition and age of the penitent, and is to refrain from asking the name of an accomplice. (c. 979)
8. The confessor is to impose salutary and suitable penances in accord with the quality and number of sins, taking into account the condition of the penitent. The penitent is obliged to fulfill these personally. (c. 981)
9. All to whom the care of souls has been entrusted... are obliged to make provision so that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them are heard when they reasonably seek to be heard and that they have the opportunity to approach individual confession on days and at time established for their convenience. (c. 986, §1)
10. Adaptations by the Minister (from the *Rite of Penance* 40). It is for priests, and especially pastors:
 - a. in celebrating reconciliation with individuals or with a community, to adapt the rite to the concrete circumstances of the penitents. They must preserve the essential structure and the entire form of absolution, but if necessary they may omit some parts of the rite for pastoral reasons or enlarge upon them, may select the texts of readings or prayers, and may choose a place more suitable for the celebration... so that the entire celebration may be enriching and effective;
 - b. to celebrate and prepare occasional penitential services during the year especially in Lent. In order that the texts chosen and the order of the celebration may be adapted to the conditions and circumstances of the community or group (for example, children, sick persons, etc.), priests may be assisted by others.

11. In urgent necessity, any confessor is obliged to hear the confessions of the Christian faithful, and in danger of death by any priest is so obliged. (c. 986, §2)
12. In the Diocese of Dodge City, the following faculty is granted to all confessors:
 - a. to remit in the internal sacramental forum any undeclared *latae sententiae* censure of excommunication or interdict if it is burdensome for the penitent to remain in the state of grave sin during the time necessary for the competent authority to make provision. This faculty is given by the law. (c. 1357, §1)
 - b. to remit in the internal sacramental forum the excommunication attached to the procurement of an abortion (c. 1398) or that attached to apostasy, heresy or schism (c. 1364, §1) without prior consultation with the bishop. (Without this faculty only the bishop could remit such a penalty.) This faculty allows the confessor to remit the excommunication and grant absolution in the hearing of a regularly scheduled confession. This does not remove the requirement of the confessor to notify the bishop of the remission, nor does it remove the necessity of imposing an appropriate penance. The confessor, respecting the sacramental seal, is to notify the bishop of the remission of the penalty. This faculty may be exercised within the diocese on behalf of any person regardless of his or her residence or the place where the penalty was incurred. The faculty may be exercised outside the diocese only when the penitent is subject of the Diocese of Dodge City.
13. The faculty is granted by the law to any presbyter (even if he lacks the faculty to hear confessions) to absolve validly and licitly any penitent whatsoever in danger of death from any censures and sins, even if an approved priest is present. (c. 976)

The Penitent

1. (From the *Rite of Penance* 6) Followers of Christ who have sinned by who, by the prompting of the Holy Spirit, come to the sacrament of penance should above all be wholeheartedly converted to God. This inner conversion embraces sorrow for sin and the intent to lead a new life.
 - a. Contrition – The most important act of the penitent is contrition, which is “heartfelt sorrow and aversion for the sin committed along with the intention of sinning no more.” ...The genuineness of penance depends on this heartfelt contrition.
 - b. Confession – Confession requires on the penitent’s part the will to open the heart to the minister of God and on the minister’s part a spiritual judgment by which, acting in the person of Christ, he pronounces his decision of forgiveness or retention of sins in accord with the power of the keys.
 - c. Act of Penance – True conversion is completed by expiation for the sins committed, by amendment of life, and also by rectifying injuries done. The kind and extent of the expiation must be suited to the personal condition of penitents so that they may restore the order that they have upset and through the corresponding remedy be cured of the sickness from which they suffered.
2. After a diligent examination of conscience, a member of the Christian faithful is obliged to confess in kind and number all grave sins committed after baptism and not yet brought to the sacrament or acknowledged in individual confession. It is recommended that persons also confess venial sins. (c. 988)
3. Any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reprovved. (Pope John Paul II Apostolic Letter *Misericordia Dei* 3, April 7, 2002)

4. After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year. (c. 989)
5. Every member of the Christian faithful is free to confess sins to a confessor of his or her choice. (c. 991)
6. The penitent is obliged to fulfill suitable penances imposed by the confessor personally. (c. 981)

Three Forms of the Sacrament

1. Rite for Reconciliation of Individual Penitents.
2. Rite for Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution.
3. Rite of Reconciliation of Penitents with General Confession and Absolution.

General Absolution (Canons 961-963 and Pope John Paul II Apostolic Letter *Misericordia Dei* 4-8)

1. Absolution cannot be imparted in a general manner to many penitents at once without previous individual confession unless:
 - a. Danger of death is imminent and there is insufficient time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of individual penitents;
 - b. There is grave necessity, that is, when in view of the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors available to hear the confessions of individuals properly within a suitable period of time in such a way that the penitents are forced to be deprived for a long while of sacramental grace or holy communion through no fault of their own. Sufficient necessity is not considered to exist when confessors cannot be present due only to the large number of penitents such as can occur on some great feast or pilgrimage.
2. It belongs to the diocesan bishop [not the confessor] to judge whether the conditions required according to the above norms are present. He can determine the cases of such necessity, attentive to the criteria agreed upon with other members of the conference of bishops. (c. 961)
3. For a member of the Christian faithful validly to receive sacramental absolution given to many at one time, it is required:
 - a. that the person be properly disposed
 - b. but also at the same time intends to confess within a suitable period of time each grave sin which at the present time cannot be so confessed. (c. 962, §1)