



Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown

Office of the Bishop

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Resumption of Publicly Scheduled Confessions

Beginning Saturday, May 23, 2020, I authorize pastors and administrators to resume the regular public celebration of the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation with these requirements:

1. In order to facilitate the arrangements that must be made for the Sacrament of Penance, pastors and administrators are authorized to make use of a parish hall, insofar as it may better accommodate the safety measures and make the sacrament more readily available to the people.
2. Until further notice, people are not to congregate in groups larger than 25, whether inside or outside of a church.
3. Parishes are advised to have ushers or ministers of hospitality available to assist in monitoring the number of people coming for confessions and assist in guiding people.
4. Penitents must observe the standard six-foot physical distancing while waiting.
5. Penitents should wear face masks while waiting their turn for confession.
6. There should be an impenetrable physical barrier, perhaps of glass or plastic, between the confessor and the penitent. Otherwise both confessor and penitent will either have to observe physical distancing or wear appropriate masks or face shields.
7. If stations for confession are arranged in an outdoor setting, penitents should remain in their vehicles or other personal space and not congregate in groups larger than 25.
8. Unless a ready exchange of fresh air is possible, confessionals should not be used; other open spaces in a church or outside in open air are preferred to enclosed confessionals.
9. Depending on pastoral need, some provision should be made for providing the option of confessing anonymously or face-to-face. This may be accomplished by a linen cloth that can be draped over the glass/plastic divider, or by the confessor facing away from the penitent; keeping in mind the need to hear and to be heard.

10. Areas in the church and/or portable confession screens must be cleaned and properly sanitized after confessions are concluded for that scheduled time.
11. The secrecy of confession should be carefully observed.
12. Priests should be extra zealous/generous in their time commitment as confessors and solicitous to penitents who may be burdened not only by sin, but emotionally by the challenges that everyone has encountered in recent times.
13. A suitable penance at this time is to have the penitent pray for an end to the Coronavirus pandemic and for the intentions of all who are afflicted or otherwise affected.
14. Parishes should cooperate in scheduling times for confessions in order to reach out to as many penitents as possible.
15. The schedule is to be communicated within the parish and shared with neighboring parishes. A copy of the confession schedule should be sent to Tony DeGol, Secretary for Communications so that information regarding the sacrament can be updated on the diocesan website and social media.
16. Confessions should be scheduled at different times (morning, afternoon, evening) to allow more people to receive the sacrament.
17. Priests who need additional help with confessions should seek assistance from neighboring priests, even to the extent of arranging for multiple priests to be available at the same time. However, no penance services are to be arranged. Only individual confessions are to be heard.

These directives remain in effect until further notice. Questions, concerns, or difficulties should be addressed to Rev. Alan Thomas, V.G.

+ Mark L. Bartchak

Most Rev. Mark L. Bartchak
Bishop of Altoona-Johnstown

Teresa M. Stayer

Teresa M. Stayer
Chancellor

DATE: May 20, 2020

