



Guidelines for 'Drive-in' Celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance

Our state government has recently clarified that drive-in church services are allowed, as long as people keep proper distance from each other, and no physical contact between persons occurs. While this does not necessarily allow for much in the way of celebrating Mass, it is clear that at least the Sacrament of Penance may now be offered in a 'drive-in' manner.

This should be offered for those who truly need it. In the interest of observing the spirit of the stay-at-home order, those who go to confession as a spiritual practice, without needing forgiveness of grave sin, should wait until the lifting of the order. Those who are not able to go to confession at this time should be reminded that perfect contrition, with the intention to go to confession as soon as possible, obtains forgiveness of sins (cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1452).

In celebrating the sacrament in this way, there are two overarching principles that must be respected:

1. The secrecy of sacramental confession must be carefully safeguarded.
2. Priest, penitent, and those waiting must keep proper distance and avoid the possibility of infection.

How exactly this can work is something which is best decided by local parishes depending on their own situations. However things are decided, enough time should be offered during the course of a week to keep the number of people waiting as small as possible, especially in churches without large parking lots.

The following guidelines are offered to help you in determining how best to carry this out:

- Since not everyone can drive, or people may come with multiple persons in the vehicle, the area should be so designed that people in general leave their vehicle for confession. There should be a place for them to park, and a separate place far enough away for the penitent to stand and confess privately. It could be designed so that those with difficulty walking, who are approaching alone, could still confess from their vehicle.
- There should be some sort of barrier (a tarp, tent, screen, etc.) between the priest and the penitent, which is somewhat impermeable but which still allows for the priest to be easily able to hear. This also respects the right of the penitent to confess anonymously.
- Penitents and priests are encouraged to wear a mask, in keeping with state and county guidelines.
- Those who for a serious reason judge it prudent to not go out should be reminded that there would still exist for them a moral impossibility of approaching the Sacrament, and thus for forgiveness of serious sins it would continue to suffice for them to simply make an Act of Perfect Contrition, with the intention to confess their sins as soon as it is prudent for them to do so.

Note: In some areas when this crisis began, priests were encouraging the use of cell phones for amplifying the voice of the penitent who would be standing nearby, in order to help with social distancing and to allow the penitent to speak more quietly. However, the following directive was conveyed to the USCCB by Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Congregation for Divine Worship:

“With regard to Penance, it is clear that the Sacrament is not to be celebrated via cell phone. In addition, in the present circumstances cell phones should not be used even for the amplification of voices between a confessor and penitent who are in visual range of each other. Current threats against the seal of confession also raise questions about information on cell phones.”