



BISHOP OF HAMILTON

March 27, 2020

Dear Reverend Monsignor:
Dear Reverend Father:

In recent days I have received inquiries from several priests concerning the COVID-19 protocols which are in place and the desire of members of the faithful to celebrate the Sacrament of Confession. In the Letter of Monsignor Kroetsch, sent at my request to Pastors on March 18, 2020, I indicated that “*no scheduled confessions are permitted at this time*”. Furthermore, the sacrament may be celebrated by appointment provided that physical distance can be maintained. The Sacrament of Reconciliation may always be celebrated in danger of death.

Some priests have expressed a concern for those who wish to celebrate the Sacrament while maintaining their anonymity; i.e., in a confessional with a screen, which is their right. This does not appear to be possible at this time, when health authorities and civic leaders are increasingly urging us to avoid close personal contact, for our safety, the safety of others, and in support of health care providers who are taking such risks.

Out of an abundance of caution and concern for the safety and health of the faithful in our Diocese, I ask that all priests refrain from the celebration of individual confessions with absolution except in the case of danger of death. Any meeting with people for confession, no matter where, can potentially put the person or yourself at risk, given the ways that we believe the COVID-19 virus is transmitted and the fact that people can have the virus for so many days even without any symptoms.

A note from the Apostolic Penitentiary (March 20, 2020) regarding the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the present pandemic emergency, especially in the places most affected by the pandemic contagion, acknowledges that it may not be possible for the faithful to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the ordinary way (individual confession of sins and absolution). In such grave cases, “*where the faithful find themselves in the painful impossibility of receiving sacramental absolution, it should be remembered that perfect contrition, coming from the love of God, beloved above all things, expressed by a sincere request for forgiveness (which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by a votum confessionis, that is, by a firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains the forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones.*”

I urge priests who are approached for the Sacrament of Confession during the present pandemic to kindly assure penitents that their sincere request for forgiveness, a perfect act of contrition and the firm resolution to confess their sins (even mortal sins) as soon as it is possible, obtains the forgiveness of their sins.

When it is again possible to celebrate the Sacraments publicly, we will have among our first duties to provide greater opportunities for the faithful to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the normative manner. In the meantime, let us continue to pray that, despite our inability to celebrate the sacraments at the present time, we may all experience God's mercy in abundance.

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,



(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, O.M.I.,
Bishop of Hamilton



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