

## *UNDERSTANDING RECONCILIATION RITE III & GENERAL ABSOLUTION*



### What It Is

The Sacrament of Reconciliation or Confession was instituted by Christ to forgive sins and to reconcile us to Himself. He calls Catholics to a life of continual conversion through this great sacramental gift.

All Catholics are obligated to participate in this sacrament at least once a year although it is encouraged to go more frequently. (Can. 989)

There are three different ways (forms) that the Church provides for this sacrament to be celebrated. This guide explains what they are how the Diocese of Superior is planning to allow the third form to be used during the current pandemic in order to continue to make this sacrament available to all.

"Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained'"

-John 20:21-23

# Different Forms

According to the Rite of Penance, published in 1973, there are three different forms that this sacrament can be celebrated in.

FORM I: Reconciliation of Individual Penitents. This takes place between a penitent and priest in private. According to Canon Law 960 this is "the only ordinary means by which a member of the faithful conscious of grave sin is reconciled with God and the Church." This will continue to be offered and is the preferred form even during a pandemic.

FORM II: Reconciliation of a Number of Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution. This is very similar to Form I and is used to "give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the sacrament".

FORM III: Reconciliation of a Number of Penitents with General Confession and Absolution. This option is rarely used except in cases of grave necessity. This form is only available if the local bishop, generally in conjunction with the local bishops conference, determines that conditions necessitate a grave necessity. The local bishop is also guided in this decision by a Vatican Tribunal called The Apostolic Penitentiary.

## General Absolution

General Absolution is when a priest is able to absolve a large group of people who have expressed sorrow for sin without hearing an individual confession. This is the defining characteristic of Form III. According to the Code of Canon Law paragraph 961, general absolution can only be given in very defined circumstances.

"Danger of death is imminent and there is insufficient time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents."

"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." (Not applicable in some circumstances)

## How It Works:

Because Form III is not the ordinary form of the sacrament of Confession, there are a few things to know about it in order to receive the sacrament validly. A person must:

**Be Properly Disposed:** Just as in Form I, a penitent should be contrite and resolved to not sin again. An examination of conscience should be done if possible.

**Be Prepared to Individually Confess:** Each penitent should be prepared to confess any grave sins forgiven in this way at the next earliest opportunity. "A person whose grave sins are remitted by general absolution is to approach individual confession as soon as possible, given the opportunity, before receiving another general absolution."

**Make An Act Of Contrition.** Canon law states that an Act of Contrition, as would be said in an individual confession, should be made before receiving general absolutions.

**Be At a Church:** The general absolution should always take place in a church if possible.

## Why Now?

Due to the current corona virus pandemic, Bishop James Powers has allowed for general absolution to be given within the Diocese of Superior at this time. Parishes will be notified when the conditions of 'grave necessity' are no longer being met that have lead to this decision.

## FORM III with Youth

- Remember to lead an in depth examination of conscience. Encourage children and youth of all ages to examine their conscience on a regular basis.
- Remind them of the things necessary to receive this sacrament: Sorrow for sin and a firm resolve to not sin again.
- Encourage youth to participate in individual reconciliation with their family if possible.

*Confession heals, confession justifies, confession grants pardon of sin, all hope consists in confession; in confession there is a chance for mercy.  
--St. Isidore of Seville*