

## Pastoral Plan for Receiving Sick Calls during the COVID-19 Pandemic

### I. When the sick person is not in immediate danger of death

#### Encourage the person to make an act of perfect contrition.

- *Contrition* is sorrow of the soul and detestation for sin committed, together with the resolution not to sin again.<sup>1</sup>
- *Perfect contrition* arises from love of God by which God is loved above all else. Perfect contrition remits venial sins and, if it includes the firm resolution to have recourse to sacramental confession as soon as possible, it also obtains forgiveness of mortal sins.<sup>2</sup>
- *Imperfect contrition* is born of the consideration of sin's ugliness or the fear of eternal damnation and other penalties threatening the sinner. By itself, imperfect contrition cannot obtain the forgiveness of grave sins, but it disposes a person to obtain forgiveness in sacramental Confession.<sup>3</sup>
- Contrition is a gift of God. We can cooperate with His grace by choosing to make acts of contrition, asking for this good gift from the heavenly Father. "If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him?"<sup>4</sup>

#### Examples of acts of perfect contrition are:

- "O my God, I am heartily sorry and beg pardon for all my sins, not so much because these sins bring suffering and hell to me, but because they have crucified my loving Savior Jesus Christ and offended Your infinite Goodness. I firmly resolve, with the help of Your grace, to confess my sins at the first available opportunity, to do penance and to amend my life. Amen."<sup>5</sup>
- Repeat frequently: "O my God, I am sorry for having offended You, because I love You."

NOTE: It can be helpful to look at a crucifix or cross when making acts of contrition.

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<sup>1</sup> CCC 1451.

<sup>2</sup> CCC 1452.

<sup>3</sup> CCC 1453.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 7:11 (RSV).

<sup>5</sup> *My Military Missal*, ed. Rev. Joseph F. Stedman, Confraternity of the Precious Blood (1942), p. 111. *Nihil obstat*: James H. Griffiths, S.T.D., Censor Librorum. *Imprimatur*: Thomas E. Molloy, S.T.D. Bishop of Brooklyn (December 8, 1942).

## **Advise the sick person about the special indulgences granted during the COVID-19 pandemic**

- An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven.<sup>6</sup>
- Sin has a double consequence: (1) Eternal punishment for grave sins deprives us eternal life in heaven; (2) Temporal punishment for either grave or venial sins purifies us of disordered attachment, either on earth or in purgatory.<sup>7</sup>
- Indulgences remit the temporal punishment of grave or venial sins, not the eternal punishment of grave sins. For the forgiveness of grave sin, a valid sacramental confession or perfect contrition with a firm resolution to return to confession at the first opportunity is necessary.<sup>8</sup>
- An indulgence is partial if it removes part, or plenary if it removes all, of the temporal punishment due to sin.<sup>9</sup>
- An indulgence is typically granted by the Church to the faithful who are duly disposed (with a spirit detached from any sin), upon certain pious practices, together with what are called the three “usual conditions”: (1) sacramental confession, (2) receiving Holy Communion, (3) praying for the Pope’s intentions.<sup>10</sup>
- **Pope Francis has granted the following plenary indulgences during the COVID-19 pandemic** for those who will unite their trial to a spirit of faith in God and charity toward their brothers and sisters, together with the will to fulfill the usual conditions as soon as possible:<sup>11</sup>
  - *For the faithful suffering from coronavirus* who unite spiritually through media to the Holy Mass, or the Rosary, or the Way of the Cross, or other forms of devotion, or if they recite the Creed, the Our Father, an invocation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
  - *For healthcare workers, family members and others who care for the sick with coronavirus.*

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<sup>6</sup> CCC 1472.

<sup>7</sup> CCC 1472.

<sup>8</sup> CCC 1472; cf. CCC 1452-53.

<sup>9</sup> CCC 1471.

<sup>10</sup> Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic (19 March 2020).

<sup>11</sup> Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary on the granting of special indulgences to the faithful in the current pandemic (19 March 2020).

- *All the faithful* who offer a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, or reading the Holy Scriptures for at least 30 minutes, or the Holy Rosary, or the Way of the Cross, or the Divine Mercy Chaplet in order to implore Almighty God for the end of the epidemic and relief for the afflicted and eternal salvation for those the Lord has called to Himself.
- *For those on the point of death and unable to receive Anointing of the Sick and Viaticum* who are duly disposed and have recited at least a few prayers in their lifetime. NOTE: In this particular case the Church does not require the three usual conditions of confession, Communion, and prayer for the Pope's intentions.

## II. When the sick person is in danger of death

### If the sick person is at home:

- If the person *does not have coronavirus*, the priest will respond immediately.
- If the person *has coronavirus...*
  - If the sick person can safely and quickly arrive at a hospital with an on-duty Catholic priest chaplain, he or she should do so.
  - If the sick person cannot timely arrive at a hospital, the priest can respond in one or more of the following ways:
    - The priest should advise the sick person about making an act of perfect contrition, (see above) looking at or imagining a crucifix or cross, and urge the person to trust in the unlimited mercy of God.
    - The priest should explain the indulgences available to the sick person (see above).
    - These or similar words can be used to help the sick person receive comfort: "In ordinary circumstances Catholics are expected to actively seek the sacraments in the usual way the Church offers them. However, there are times when the Sacraments cannot be given due to extraordinary circumstances such as extreme weather, natural disasters or plague. In some parts of the world too, priests are not routinely available. In such cases Catholics should be reassured that the desire to receive the sacraments is, itself a way to receive the Sacrament. God does not ask of us the

impossible or the unreasonable. There is a long tradition stretching back to the good thief on the cross of the “baptism of desire.” Jesus assured him of paradise even though he could not, at that moment, receive baptism in the usual way. In these times of pandemic, we have also had to rediscover the tradition of spiritual Communion. When the faithful cannot reasonably receive Holy Communion, they are encouraged to express their desire for it to the Lord and be assured that, in their desire for Holy Communion sincerely expressed, they receive the graces of it. The faithful should also be assured that, in their desire for the Anointing of the Sick and Confession, if they cannot reasonably receive them in the ordinary manner, God knows their desire and will surely supply the graces they seek. God knows our hearts and will grant the graces we seek even if the usual ways he has set forth are not possible. May God’s people be at peace in this time of pandemic knowing that their priests continue to offer the Mass on their behalf and that, through their desires; they are united to the Lord who seeks to bless them.

- The priest may also make a house call, taking all available caution to avoid transmission by, for example, wearing a protective mask and gloves, and
  - Administering the sacraments through a window in a home or vehicle, if possible; and/or
  - Using an instrument such as a cotton swab to anoint the sick person. A single anointing while saying the entire Form (“Through this holy anointing... May the Lord who frees you from sin...”) suffices for valid administration of the Sacrament. A swab should not be used for multiple anointings, and should be properly disposed of (e.g. by burning).” [Canon 1000 §1, 2 and Pastoral Care of Sick, 23]
  - Holy Communion (Viaticum) may be administered if deemed possible and taking necessary precautions (e.g. use of hand sanitizer). Otherwise, the priest may lead the sick in making an act of spiritual communion.
  - The time spent with the person should be kept to a minimum.
  - If a priest is wearing a protective mask and gloves while visiting the coronavirus patient, he may return to his rectory, being careful to change his clothes in an entryway or other room near the entrance and washing his hands before entering into any living area with other priests. The recommendation for anyone who comes into contact with anyone who is ill is to monitor their health. If they feel

feverish or have any respiratory symptoms they are to hold in place (self-isolation at this point) and call their doctor if symptoms continue more than 24 hours.

**If an individual sick person is in a hospital or nursing home without a Catholic priest chaplain on duty:**

- The priest will attempt to gain access to the hospital or nursing home to administer the Last Rites, using all available precautions described above. The recommendation for anyone who comes into contact with anyone who is ill is to monitor their health. If they feel feverish or have any respiratory symptoms they are to hold in place (self-isolation at this point) and call their doctor if symptoms continue more than 24 hours.
- If he cannot gain access, the priest should advise the sick person about making an act of perfect contrition, (see above) looking at or imagining a crucifix or cross, and urge the person to trust in the unlimited mercy of God.
- The priest should explain the indulgences available to the sick person (see above).
- The priest may also comfort the sick person using the words above about desiring sacramental grace from the Lord

**If there are several sick persons in a hospital or nursing home:**

- The priest will attempt to gain access to the hospital or nursing home to administer the Last Rites, using all available precautions described above. The recommendation for anyone who comes into contact with anyone who is ill is to monitor their health. If they feel feverish or have any respiratory symptoms they are to hold in place (self-isolation at this point) and call their doctor if symptoms continue more than 24 hours.
- If he cannot gain access, the priest should advise the sick persons about making an act of perfect contrition (see above) looking at or imagining a crucifix or cross, and trusting the unlimited mercy of God.
- In any case, the priest should explain the indulgences available to the sick persons (see above).
- If the priest cannot gain access to the dying for individual confession, he has the faculty to give general absolution. To impart general absolution:

- The priest should inform the faithful, insofar as is possible, of the need to be properly disposed (a spirit detached from sin), to make an act of contrition (perfect or imperfect), resolve to confess grave sins within a suitable period of time when the opportunity arises.<sup>12</sup>
- When the priest imparts general absolution, the faithful are to know that he is doing so, and his voice should be heard by those receiving absolution. This may be done over a public address system or by other means.<sup>13</sup>
  - *NB: While general absolution may be administered at a distance, the priest and recipients must still at least be morally present to one another. This means that the recipients should be able at least to hear (even with amplification) or to see the priest in the hospital ward, in the building, or on the grounds, etc. The priest cannot be a long distance away, at a rectory for example.*
- To impart general absolution: The priest invites the faithful receiving absolution to make some sign of penitence (bowing the head, kneeling, or otherwise). The penitents say a general formula of confession (“I confess to almighty God...”) and then the Lord’s Prayer, and the priest gives absolution in the usual form (“God, the Father of mercies...**and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.** R. Amen.”).<sup>14</sup>
- In imminent danger of death, the priest may use only the form of absolution itself. This may be shortened to: “**I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, + and of the Holy Spirit.** R. Amen.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Decree of Archbishop Wilton Gregory (24 March 2020).

<sup>13</sup> Decree of Archbishop Wilton Gregory (24 March 2020).

<sup>14</sup> *Rite of Penance* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2009), 61.

<sup>15</sup> *Rite of Penance* (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Corp., 2009), 61.