



**UPDATE ON THE SACRAMENTS OF HEALING  
DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC (COVID-19)  
OFFICE FOR DIVINE WORSHIP  
ARCHDIOCESE OF PHILADELPHIA  
MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2020**

Celebrating the Sacraments, especially the Sacraments of Healing, is especially significant during this Coronavirus Pandemic. Balancing what is required for a valid celebration of the Sacrament, the spiritual needs of the clergy and faithful and preventing the spread of the virus brings a new set of pastoral challenges for priests. Below you will find some additional information with regard to hearing Confessions and guidelines for administering the Anointing of the Sick. This update is a response to information from the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments published this past Friday, March 27, 2020. All previous directives with regard to the Sacraments of Healing remain in force.

**THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE AND RECONCILIATION**

The Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation must be celebrated in person, therefore, it can not be celebrated via cell phone or video conferencing. 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.

**THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK**

As the number of persons becoming seriously ill with the Coronavirus increases, priests may be called upon with greater frequency to celebrate the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The following guidelines for administering this Sacrament are to be universally observed in the Archdiocese.

**Guidelines for Administering the Anointing of the Sick to Persons  
Who are Carriers of COVID-19**

- When reasonably possible, the Anointing of the Sick for those who are carriers of COVID-19 should be performed by priests who are NOT in high risk groups. (High risk groups include those over 65, and/or those with comorbidity, for example, when two or more

chronic illnesses are present, such as, Hypertension, diabetes, Crohn's disease, any cancers, rheumatoid arthritis, asthma, COPD, and/or heart disease).

- Also, priests with symptoms of infection (fever, cough, shortness of breath) should not risk exposing others to the illness.
- If the Anointing of the Sick is performed in a hospital or healthcare facility, their guidelines for protective measures, including garments, prevail.
- If the Anointing of the Sick is not performed in a hospital or healthcare facility:
  - If available, latex gloves should be worn unless the patient or priest has an allergic sensitivity to latex.
  - Additionally, if available, protective eye wear (a pair of glasses will suffice) should be worn. Eyeglasses or goggles or eye protectors can be re-used BUT MUST be cleaned immediately after each visit with Lysol/Clorox wipes or washed with soap and water.
- Wash hands or use a hand sanitizer both before and after the visit.
- The anointing may be done with a cotton-tipped swab or a cotton ball, which is to be burned or buried after use.
- If the priest uses his gloved hand, the glove is to be burned or buried after the visit.
- ***It is NOT permitted to delegate someone else (such as a deacon, doctor, nurse or family member) to perform the anointing.***
- If necessary, a single anointing on the forehead or even some other part of the body is sufficient, while the entire formula is prayed.
- If Holy Communion is given, it is strongly encouraged that the host be received in the hand.
- Maintain social distance (six feet) with everyone in the room, except the patient.
- Do not offer comfort with any physical contact.

*Portions adapted from Guidelines issued by the Archdiocese of Boston*

- *Finally, the USCCB has noted that when it is not possible to administer the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, then what the Apostolic Penitentiary said about the Sacrament of Penance might be applied analogously to the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: "Where the individual 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 (that which the penitent is at present able to express) and accompanied by votum confessionis, that is, by the firm resolution to have recourse, as soon as possible, to sacramental confession, obtains forgiveness of sins, even mortal ones (cf. CCC, no. 1452)."*

Thank you so very much for your generous assistance during these most unusual times in the life of our local church. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at [fr.dgill@archphila.org](mailto:fr.dgill@archphila.org).

In Christ, Father Dennis Gill, Director, Office for Divine Worship