

Confession: COVID-19 Guidance

The Sacrament of Confession/Penance requires the one-to-one encounter between a priest and the penitent. As such, this must be conducted in as safe a way as possible.

Principles

The principles used to stop infection transmission during confession are:

- preventing droplet spread between priest and penitent through physical distance or barriers or positioning.
- thorough cleaning and good hygiene to prevent spread between penitents using the same kneeler or chair by cleaning points that are touched frequently (eg the top of the kneeler).

The times of confession, either indoors and/or outdoors, may now be advertised.

Confession outdoors

Confession outdoors is permitted. Social distancing should be observed for this and good hygiene though cleaning surfaces frequently touched by penitents should be ensured. Placing the penitent and priest at right angles to each other or back to back would further reduce air spread containing droplets between them. Asking penitents to sanitise their hands when arriving is a sensible step.

Confession inside churches or buildings

Within a church, if the church environment allows for confession to take place in an open space (such as a side chapel or other private area), this is preferred. If possible, the priest and the penitent should not sit face-to-face but at right angles to each other or side-by-side, facing opposite directions, whilst still allowing for the spoken matter to be heard. Penitents should have sanitised their hands when entering the church as part of existing measures.

- It may be possible to place a plastic or glass screen between the priest and the penitent which would allow for a face-to-face encounter. If so, the screen should be made of a solid material.
- If a grille is used, a cloth curtain (or a piece of plastic film) should be placed over the priest's side to minimise transmission risk.

- If a chair or a kneeler is used for the penitent, the touchpoints (where the penitent has touched with their hands) should be cleaned with household detergent after each penitent; it may make things easier if the penitent were to stand.

At this time, the use of traditional confessionals should be avoided if possible, due to the restricted airflow within them. However, if they are to be used, traditional “Roman style” confessionals (penitent kneeling at right angles to the priest speaking through a grille) are best. A plastic film on the priest’s side covering the grille will provide a barrier against air droplets.

The touchpoints on the kneeler should be cleaned after each penitent.

Maximising the airflow through the confessional would be a priority; such as, if possible, leaving the door open.

Above all, priests should ensure that through ensuring the regular cleaning of the points that are touched frequently and the positioning of a barrier between penitent and himself, the risk of virus transmission is minimised.

Priests should limit the number of confessions they hear each day to reduce their exposure risk.