

MISSIONARY OF MERCY



Pope Francis names Father Bryan Jerabek to a team of priests able to absolve 'reserved sins'



(One Voice photo/Mary D. Dillard)

With a decree dated Nov. 23, 2020, the liturgical memorial of Blessed Miguel Pro, Father Bryan Jerabek, pastor & rector of the Cathedral of St. Paul in Birmingham, was named a Pontifical Missionary of Mercy by Pope Francis. The decree, signed by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, arrived in Birmingham earlier this month. It was accompanied by a confessional stole embroidered with the logo of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which depicts the Good Shepherd rescuing a lost sheep and the Latin phrase "Misericordes sicut Pater" ("[Be] merciful like the Father" – John 6:36).

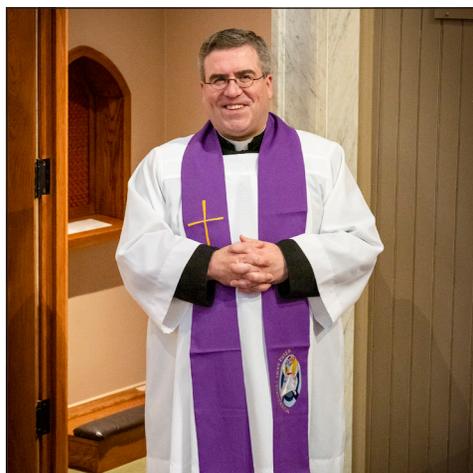
"I am most grateful to the Holy Father for adding Father Bryan Jerabek to the team of Missionaries of Mercy," Bishop Steven Raica stated. "He now joins Father John Paul Zeller, MFVA, as a second Missionary of Mercy for the Diocese of Birmingham and beyond."

"Missionaries of Mercy" are priests delegated in a particular way by the pope to absolve certain sins that a regular priest or even a bishop may not ordinarily absolve. These are known as "reserved sins" and have to do with more serious matters that the Church sees not only as sinful, but also as criminal (under canon law), with the penalty of excommunication attached to them. Anyone who is guilty of one of these sins and who is repentant may go to a Missionary of Mercy to have not only the sin forgiven, but the penalty of excommunication remitted or lifted. Before the existence of Missionaries of Mercy, to resolve a situation like this required

contacting the Vatican directly, either on one's own or by means of a confessor.

With the Jubilee Year of Mercy of 2015-2016, Pope Francis introduced the Missionaries of Mercy not only as a way of streamlining the process of having more serious matters like those mentioned above resolved, so that all could more readily experience God's infinite mercy, but also as a way of re-emphasizing the sacrament of confession for all Catholics. "By personally commissioning certain priests to hear confessions and giving them the faculty to absolve virtually every sin, whether ordinary or reserved," Father Jerabek said, "the pope is showing his fatherly concern for all in a very concrete and local way."

Father Jerabek added, "I am humbled by this appointment and accept it with gratitude



Father Bryan Jerabek stands outside one of the confessionals in the Cathedral of St. Paul wearing his Missionary of Mercy stole. (One Voice photo/Mary D. Dillard)

and a sense of renewed commitment to the sacrament of confession, which has been so important in my own spiritual growth and which played a big role in my experience of a vocation to the priesthood. At the Cathedral we have been offering reconciliation six days per week ever since the Jubilee Year of Mercy, and it is wonderful that we can now add this new emphasis to our ministry of mercy." Father Jerabek was ordained on June 7, 2008 and has been pastor and rector of the Cathedral since July of 2016; he also serves as Chancellor of the Diocese and has the faculties of a Vicar General.

The letter that accompanied the decree and confessional stole provided greater detail about the specific "reserved sins" that Missionaries of Mercy may absolve. They are: 1) profanation of the Eucharistic species by taking them away or keeping them for a sacrilegious purpose; 2) use of physical force against the Roman Pontiff; 3) absolution of an accomplice in a sin against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue; 4) direct violation against the sacramental seal by a confessor; 5) the recording by means of a technical device of what the priest or the penitent says in a sacramental confession (whether real or simulated), or the divulging of such a recording through the means of social communication. These reserved sins may well be fairly uncommon, but the Holy Father has wanted to remove any and all obstacles to the reception of God's mercy.

Another sin that has ordinarily been "reserved" – not to the Holy See but to the local bishop – is that of abortion. Priests in

the Diocese of Birmingham, and indeed, in most parts of the United States, have long had a special permission to absolve the sin of abortion without having first to contact the bishop. But in an Apostolic Letter at the conclusion of the Year of Mercy, emphasizing how he wanted to remove all obstacles, Pope Francis extended this faculty to all the priests of the world: "...lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God's forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion." The Holy Father continued, "I wish to restate as firmly as I can that abortion is a grave sin, since it puts an end to an innocent life. In the same way, however, I can and must state that there is no sin that God's mercy cannot reach and wipe away when it finds a repentant heart seeking to be reconciled with the Father. May every priest, therefore, be a guide, support and comfort to penitents on this journey of special reconciliation."

Times for the sacrament of confession at the Cathedral of St. Paul is available at <http://stpaulsbhm.org>. Anyone longing to return to the sacraments or to work through any difficult issue may wish to make an appointment, to ensure that there is no pressure and plenty of time. To do so, call Father Jerabek at 205-251-1279 or email him directly at fatherjerabek@outlook.com.

Further information about Missionaries of Mercy in the Diocese of Birmingham and the additional services they offer, beyond the confessional, will be shared via diocesan communication outlets in the near future.