

**RITE FOR RECONCILIATION OF PENITENTS  
WITH GENERAL CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION  
FROM THE RITE OF PENANCE**

*The Discipline of General Absolution*

**31.** An individual, complete confession and the receiving of absolution constitute the sole, ordinary means for a member of the faithful who is conscious of serious sin to be reconciled with God and the Church. Physical or moral impossibility alone excuses from this kind of confession; in the case of such impossibility, reconciliation is possible in other ways.

Absolution without prior, individual confession cannot be given collectively to a number of penitents unless:

- a) the danger of death is imminent and there is no time for a priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;
- b) a serious need is present, namely, given the number of penitents, not enough confessors are available to hear the individual confessions properly within a reasonable time, with the result that through no fault of their own, the faithful would be forced to be for a long time without the grace of the sacrament or without communion. The need in question is not regarded as sufficient when the nonavailability of confessors is based solely on their being a large number of penitents, such as may be the case at some great festival or pilgrimage.<sup>46</sup>

**32.** To make the judgment on whether the requisite conditions already stated in no. 31[b] are verified belongs to the diocesan bishop. After considering the criteria agreed on with the other members of the episcopal conference, he can decide which cases involve the need in question.<sup>47</sup>

**33.** For the valid reception of general sacramental absolution it is required that the faithful not only be properly disposed but at the same time have the resolution to confess in due time each of those serious sins that they cannot at the present time confess in this way.

On the occasion of the reception of general absolution, the faithful, to the extent possible, are to be instructed on the requirements just mentioned; even in the case of danger of death when time allows, the imparting of general absolution is to be preceded by an exhortation that each recipient strive to make an act of contrition.<sup>48</sup>

**34.** Unless there is a good reason preventing it, those who receive pardon for serious sins through general absolution are to go to individual confession as soon as they have the opportunity before any further reception of general absolution. And unless a moral impossibility stands in the way, they are absolutely bound to go to a confessor within one year. For the precept binding every one of the faithful binds them as well, namely, to confess individually to a priest at least once a year all those grave sins not hitherto confessed one by one.<sup>49</sup>

## Footnotes

46. See Code of Canon Law, can. 960 and 961, §1

47. See Code of Canon Law, can. 961, §2

48. See Code of Canon Law, can. 962, §§1 and 2

49. See Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*, June 16, 1972, nos. VII and VIII. Code of Canon Law can. 963, 989

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## Relevant Texts Cited in Footnotes

### *Code of Canon Law*

**Can. 960** Individual and integral confession and absolution constitute the only ordinary means by which a member of the faithful conscious of grave sin is reconciled with God and the Church. Only physical or moral impossibility excuses from confession of this type; in such a case reconciliation can be obtained by other means.

**Can. 961 §1.** Absolution cannot be imparted in a general manner to many penitents at once without previous individual confession unless:

**1/** danger of death is imminent and there is insufficient time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;

**2/** there is grave necessity, that is, 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. Sufficient necessity is not considered to exist when confessors cannot be present due only to the large number of penitents such as can occur on some great feast or pilgrimage.

**§2.** It belongs to the diocesan bishop to judge whether the conditions required according to the norm of §1, n. 2 are present. He can determine the cases of such necessity, attentive to the criteria agreed upon with the other members of the conference of bishops.

**Can. 962 §1.** For a member of the Christian faithful validly to receive sacramental absolution given to many at one time, it is required not only that the person is properly disposed but also at the same time intends to confess within a suitable period of time each grave sin which at the present time cannot be so confessed.

§2. Insofar as it can be done even on the occasion of the reception of general absolution, the Christian faithful are to be instructed about the requirements of the norm of §1. An exhortation that each person take care to make an act of contrition is to precede general absolution even in the case of danger of death, if there is time.

Can. 963 Without prejudice to the obligation mentioned in can. 989, 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, unless a just cause intervenes.

Can. 989 After having reached the age of discretion, each member of the faithful is obliged to confess faithfully his or her grave sins at least once a year.

*Normae pastorales circa absolutionem sacramentalem generali modo impertiendam*  
*Pastoral norms for the administration of general sacramental absolution*

VII

Those who have serious sins forgiven by general absolution should make an auricular confession before receiving absolution in this collective form another time unless a just cause prevents them. They are strictly obliged, unless prevented by moral impossibility, to go to confession within a year. They too are affected by the precept that obliges every Christian to confess privately to a priest once a year at least all his serious sins that he has not yet specifically confessed (cf. Fourth Lateran Council, c. 21 and also Council of Trent, *Doctrina de Sacramento Paenitentiae*, c. 5; *De Confessione* and canons 7 and 8: DS, 1679-1683, 1707-1708; cf. also Proposition II condemned by the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office in the Decree of 24 September 1665: DS 2031).

VIII

Priests are to teach the faithful that those who are aware of being in mortal sin are forbidden to refuse deliberately or by neglect to satisfy the obligation of individual confession, when it is possible to have a confessor, while they wait for an occasion for collective absolution (cf. *Instruction of the Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary*, 25 March 1944).