

### Corpus chronology

Active congregations led by dynamic pastors have made Corpus Christi a leader in change in the Diocese of Rochester throughout the last 100 years. Page 5.



### More than money

The creator of a new fund for Catholic women's projects says they seek not only money, but also wider acceptance, recognition and support for the work of women in the Church. Page 6.

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## Vote defines vague words of law on rite

By Lee Strong

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops' new one-month norm for general absolution will not significantly affect practices in the Diocese of Rochester, according to diocesan officials.

The bishops ratified the rule, which is pending Vatican approval, by a vote of 205-72. The new criterion says that when a bishop is faced with the question of whether to allow general absolution in a particular situation in his diocese, one criterion he should use is whether, in his personal judgment, the penitents would otherwise not have access to the sacraments for at least one month. The length of time is indefinitely defined by Canon 961 of the Code of Canon Law as "for a long time."

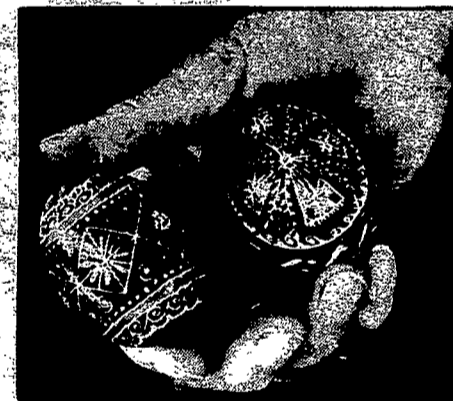
The Diocese of Rochester's sacramental guidelines, published in 1981, refer to the indefinite time span set forth in the code. According to Father Thomas Mull, a consultant with the diocesan liturgy office, the new rule clarifies that aspect of diocesan regulations on the sacrament of reconciliation, but does not affect the rest of the regulations governing general absolution. Nor does the new rule affect the validity of general absolution services that have been performed in the diocese, Father Mull said.

"I don't see it as changing our guidelines, in that ours reflect what is in canon law," said the former director of the diocesan liturgy office. "The new guideline has just made it more specific — defined what a suitable period of time is."

Father Mull noted that in the diocese, general absolution is given only in special circumstances and during particular seasons of the year when large numbers of penitents seek confession — both of which are allowed under the code. He noted, however, that "if general absolution is offered in a situation where there are more penitents than a confessor can handle at a single time, instruction has to be given that those guilty of serious sin have to go to private individual confession — under the new guidelines within a month." Previously, the diocese had said that penitents with serious sins must make an individual confession within a year of receiving general absolution.

Diocesan rules — in keeping with the code — allow three forms of confession: individual confessions; communal penance services with individual confession and absolution (and with either individual or communal penances); and general absolution services. The most common reason for conducting general absolution is larger numbers of penitents than can be accommodated by the number of confessors available. This situation most frequently develops during Advent and Lent.

At St. Ambrose Parish, for example, communal penance services during these two seasons frequently attract as many as 1,500 penitents each — far more than can be handled even when a number of confessors are available, according to Father James Marvin, the parish's pastor.



Bonnie Trafelet/Courier-Journal  
Mark Miller spins Christine Serwetayk (top), and Bill Hrynczysyn does the splits (left) as the Ukrainian Dance and Arts Council of Rochester performs traditional dances during St. Joseph's annual festival. The event also featured Ukrainian arts and crafts, demonstrations and food.

"I'm a convert to general absolution," Father Marvin said. "I really wasn't wild about the idea of it at first, but we had to do it out of need — there's no way two of us active priests could handle the crowd. Now I'm convinced that it's a good thing."

Father Marvin reported that the services are now so crowded that people stand along the walls and even out into the driveway. He sees more value to the services than simply accommodating large numbers, however. "It's reconciliation within a community context, and that's what I think the sacrament of reconciliation is all about," he noted.

The services also help to create a more prayerful and healing atmosphere than was

possible at times with individual confessions, Father Marvin said. "When you have so many people coming for individual confession, you don't have time for quality time with them," he explained. "(With general absolution), you have Scripture readings, a talk and a renewal of baptismal vows. It's a beautiful experience and much more meaningful."

He also reported an increased number of people coming to individual confession as a result of general absolution.

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan, who frequently conducts the general absolution rites at St. Ambrose, said that this phenomenon is common. "I've been told by the pastors of parishes that a number of people do seek private confession afterwards," he said.

Yet a number of parishes do not offer general absolution. Our Lady of Victory Church in downtown Rochester, for example, has had no need for general absolution services, according to Father George Rosenkranz.

"We would never have a general absolution service," the parochial vicar said. "We are in a unique situation in that we offer confession before every Mass. We make ourselves available regularly, so we've never had to go to the

second form (penance services with individual confessions), and definitely never the third (general absolution)."

St. Leo's in Hilton is another parish that has never conducted a general absolution service. Father Chester Klocek, the pastor, noted that the parish has scheduled enough confession times to meet parishioners' needs, and added that he does not agree with general absolution as it is sometimes used.

"I don't believe in general absolution, because this is the mind of the Holy Father," Father Klocek said. He added that he thought general absolution should only be used in emergency situations — such as during time of war or on sinking ships at sea. "There's no emergency in this country at all; I think general absolution has been very abused," the priest said.

Father Klocek also noted that too many people are not taking advantage of regular confession throughout the year, thus causing large numbers to seek confession during Advent and Lent. "Our Lady has been appearing at various places — most recently Medjugorje — and everywhere she says we should be going to con-

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