



Diocese of Austin

Office of the Bishop

The Catholic Church of Central Texas
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May 3, 2006

Pastors and All Priests Serving in the Diocese of Austin
Deacons
Catholic School Principals and Religious Education Directors
Parish Religious Education Directors
Youth Ministers

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

As part of our observance of the Diocesan Year of Forgiveness and Healing the Presbyteral Council discussed the Sacrament of Penance and its availability in parishes, religious education programs and Catholic schools throughout our Diocese.

Enclosed you will find the results of a survey that parishes participated in giving us a better understanding of the availability of the sacrament. While many parishes offer the sacrament on a regular basis, the Presbyteral Council discussed that it may be time for us to examine ways to encourage people to celebrate the sacrament more frequently.

The discussion of the Presbyteral Council indicated that many of our people have gotten into a complacency regarding the Sacrament of Penance and have not taken advantage of celebrating God's mercy. This would be an effort on our part to make the sacrament more available, but also to use it as a teachable moment.

As a result of the discussion, the Presbyteral Council made the following suggestions which I wholeheartedly endorse.

1. That the Sacrament of Penance continue to be made available on every Saturday afternoon for an appropriate period of time in each parish.
2. That Advent and Lenten penance services continue to be held in parishes and in deaneries.
3. That all parishes consider making the Sacrament of Penance available at least once a month at an additional time other than on the weekends, specifically on a weekday during the day and/or at night; for example, the Thursday night before First Friday or in conjunction with some parish activity. It is suggested that this be done on at least a monthly basis for a period of one year in order to invite others to celebrate the sacrament more frequently and to come to a better appreciation of the availability of God's healing power. Some priests have been pleasantly surprised by the number of people who come on a weekday morning or at 5:30 p.m. after work.
4. That all schools within the Diocese (parish schools, regional schools and independent schools), elementary and high schools, make the Sacrament of Penance available to all of the students once each semester.

5. That all religious education programs in our Diocese teach the Sacrament of Penance in a thorough way and make the sacrament available each semester for all grade levels.
6. That all youth ministry programs discuss the Sacrament of Penance and make it available two times each year as part of their youth ministry activities.
7. Retired priests should be invited to parishes to offer the sacrament, thereby providing a second confessor and an opportunity for the retired priests to continue in this important ministry.
8. The Diocese will publish through the *Catholic Spirit* and in a bulletin insert format a guide to celebrating the Sacrament of Penance.

I would be very happy to receive any comments regarding these suggestions.

There were several members of the Presbyteral Council who mentioned that the sacrament is available in their parishes on a frequent basis and that people do come to celebrate the sacrament and are grateful for these opportunities.

I ask you to implement the above mentioned suggestions. Thank you for your ministry. Wishing you God's blessings during this Easter season, I am

Gratefully in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Aymond", with a small cross symbol to the left of the first letter.

Most Reverend Gregory M. Aymond
Bishop of Austin

GMA/lm

Encl.

Parish Survey

Survey's returned:

Principal:	5
Youth Minister:	21
RE Director:	39
Pastor:	51
	<u>116</u>

How many families are in your parish:

Did not respond:	5
1 - 500:	35
500 - 1,000:	26
1,001 - 1,500:	14
1,501 - 2,000:	12
2,001 - 2,500:	2
2,501 - 3,000:	9
3,001 - 3,500:	2
3,501 - 4,000:	0
4,001 - 4,500:	1
	<u>106</u>

When are confessions heard:

Did not respond:	8
Everyday:	8
Sunday:	5
Monday:	9
Tuesday:	14
Wednesday:	19
Thursday:	15
Friday:	18
Saturday:	43 41
By appointment/request	22
Other:	Wedding; Quince Ano's; 1st Friday

Do you have a communal penitance service during the year:

Did not respond:	5
Advent & Lent:	71
Other:	30 (Marathon confession at end of fall & spring semester; retreats; 1st communion & confirmation; 1st confession; visiting priest; 1st reconciliation; summer religious school; beginning of school year; during various liturgical seasons)

Are confessions available in both Spanish & English:

Did not respond:	5
Both:	55
English only:	42
Other:	4 (1 - Vietnamese; 3 during penance services)
	<u>106</u>

Parish Survey

How many children and teenagers are in the Parish RE Program:

44,000

Are confessions heard during RE periods in the parish:

Yes: 71

No: 25

If Yes, how many times during the year:

Average count of 2-3 times a year: Mostly during Advent, Lent and 1st Confessions

If you have a parish school, are confessions scheduled for the school children during the school year:

Yes: 19

No: 6

If Yes, how often:

Average count was 2-3 times a year: During Advent, Lent and Class Retreats

Because parishioners' weekend schedule is hectic, do you think there is an alternative to

"Saturday Confessions" before the Vigil Mass in your parish:

Yes: 50

No: 20

If Yes, when would you suggest:

3-4 times during the week; evenings; during parish missions, healing service, special retreats; before all masses;

Sundays before Mass; after daily mass; during adoration; during Lent and reconciliation services;

By appointments; During Holy Week and Christmas