

COMPLEMENTARY NORMS TO CANON 964 §2

Can. 964 §1 The proper place for hearing sacramental confessions is a church or oratory.

Can. 964 §2 As far as the confessional is concerned, norms are to be issued by the Episcopal Conference, with the proviso however that the confessionals, which the faithful who so wish may freely use, are located in an open place, and fitted with a fixed grille between the penitent and the confessor.

Can. 964 §3 Except for a just reason confessions are not to be heard elsewhere than in a confessional.

Complementary Norms

The Irish Episcopal Conference, in accordance with the prescriptions of canon 964, and with due regard for the Authentic Interpretation of canon 964 §2 by the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, 7 July 1998 (*AAS* 90 [1998] 711)^[1], hereby decrees the following complementary norms governing the disposition and location of confessionals:

- Confessionals are to be located in a place which is clearly visible and accessible, and are to be fitted with a fixed grille between the penitent and confessor
- Rooms which are as confessionals must be in a public place, visible (for example through the provision of a glass panel), and provide the penitent with the option of using a grille
- Sacramental confession for children should be in a place where both priest and child may be seen but not heard, preferably in a church or oratory.

[1] Dubium: Whether, in view of what is prescribed in c. 964 §2, the minister of the sacrament, for a just reason and apart from a case of necessity, can lawfully decide, even if the penitent may request otherwise, that a sacramental confession be heard in confessional equipped with a fixed grille.

Responsum: Affirmative.

Commentary on the complementary norms

Special emphasis should be given during the training of Confessors and future Confessors on the appropriate use of the gesture whereby the priest extends his hands, or at least his right hand, over the penitent's head during the words of absolution in the Rite of Reconciliation of Several Penitents with Individual Confession and Absolution (Form 2) (*Ordo paenitentiae* 48).

It is also imperative that this training includes clear teaching on the boundaries which must be preserved, not only in relation to the physical location and

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Responsum: Affirmative.

disposition of confessionals, but also on the appropriate levels of interrogation of the penitent, as well as the areas in which counsel is offered by the Confessor.

Every effort should be made to facilitate the penitent in the celebration of the sacrament. Suggested formulae, adequate lighting, and attention to ambience are all part of this provision.

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