

Sacrament of Reconciliation for Deaf Community Best Practices for Diocese of Des Moines

Below are best practice options for priests to make available to the Deaf community to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation in the Diocese of Des Moines. These options can be offered based on what is available. If a priest fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) is not available, the person who is deaf should make the final decision based on their comfort level.

1. The most accessible, and preferred, method of celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation for the person who is deaf is to celebrate the sacrament with a priest fluent in ASL so they can have direct communication with each other.

If there is a priest fluent in ASL nearby in your own diocese, or from a neighboring diocese, you can work with that priest to come on an occasional basis, or as needed, to meet with the people in the Deaf community to celebrate the sacrament. If the priest is outside your diocese, the priest must send a Letter of Good Standing to the Office of the Diocesan Chancellor two weeks prior to their arrival.

2. If the Sacrament of Reconciliation is celebrated with a priest who does not know ASL it is permitted to use written communication. If using written notes for confession the person's English skills do not have to be extensive. It is enough that the penitent in general communicate to the priest the very basic nature of the sin being confessed, for example "gossip" or "anger" or stealing." Further details are not required. It is important that confessors understand that English is the second language of the penitent who is deaf and thus should not be used to gauge contrition or comprehension.

The confessor will later physically destroy the written notes. The penitent is also free to retain them back to destroy them personally.

3. A third option is to have an interpreter present. The interpreter would need to be approved by the Bishop and instructed in the sacramental seal, which applies to them as much as it does the confessor, and authorized by the Diocese before serving in this capacity. The interpreter would voice for the person who is deaf and sign for the priest.
4. If the confession is requested in an emergency situation, such as prior to a medical procedure, and interpretive methods (notes or interpreter) are unavailable, general absolution may be given. If the individual also wishes to receive the Anointing of the Sick, having an ASL interpreter present provides ideal pastoral care.
5. In the Diocese of Des Moines please contact the Coordinator of Persons with Disability Ministry to be referred to a priest fluent in ASL or an ASL interpreter who is authorized by the Diocese to serve in this capacity for the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
6. The [Guidelines for the Celebration of the Sacraments with Persons with Disabilities](#), paragraph 30, addresses the Sacrament of Reconciliation for Catholics who are deaf.

References:

Fr. Trevor Chicoine, STL, Director of Worship, Diocese of Des Moines, July 19, 2022

Fr. Christopher Klusman, Director of the Deaf Apostolate, Archdiocese of Milwaukee, email 4/19/2022

Joan Macy, NCOD President, email 4/14/2022

Cheryl Vanleeuwen, Instructor Fundamentals of Deaf Faith Formation Methodologies course, fall 2020, and ASL interpreter, 4/11/2022