



CONGREGATIO DE CULTU DIVINO  
ET DISCIPLINA SACRAMENTORUM

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Prot. N. 470/20

Vatican City, 1 October 2020

Your Eminence,  
Your Excellency,

During the course of the current Covid-19 pandemic this Congregation has received a number enquiries from Episcopal Conferences and from individual Bishops about the correct way to validly administer the Sacrament of Confirmation given the rules on social distancing in force in many places.

The question has a number of dimensions. Firstly must the anointing with chrism be accompanied by the imposition of the hand or is anointing sufficient. Secondly, must the anointing be done with the nude thumb for the sacrament to be validly administered, or can the minister avail of an instrument, such as gloves or a cotton swab?

The first question was already answered by the Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Decrees of Vatican Council II, cf. *Notitiae* 7 (1972) pp. 281-285, which held that anointing sufficiently manifests the imposition of the hand, therefore the imposition of the hand at the same time is not a necessity for validity.

The second question, regarding the use of an instrument such as a cotton swab, was recently submitted to the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts. Thus the formal response to this question is as follows: "For the validity of the Sacrament of Confirmation the law establishes that it is conferred by the ordinary minister, and by a priest with the faculty to do so, through the anointing with chrism on the forehead while the words prescribed in the liturgical books are pronounced (cf. cann. 880 § 1 and 882 of the Code of Canon Law). The use by the minister of an instrument (gloves, cotton swab...), does not affect the validity of the Sacrament".

However, we do underline that such practices, where they are adopted, are only to last until the end of the current emergency.

We hope that this provides the required clarity and ask that you share this letter with your brother Bishops on the bench.

With sentiments of fraternal esteem, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Robert Card. SARAH  
Prefect

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To the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences