



Norms for the Placement of the Tabernacle in the Parish Churches of the Archdiocese of Vancouver

A. Preamble

The church building, which is both the house of God on earth (*domus Dei*) and a house fit for the prayers of the community of faith (*domus ecclesiae*), possesses a sacramental dimension. By its very structure, it should help worshipers to encounter Christ. The honoured presence of the Blessed Sacrament lends a Catholic church building its particular sacramental character. For this reason, Pope Paul VI affirmed the Real Presence in the tabernacle as the “living heart of each of our churches.”¹

The adoration of the Eucharist outside of the Mass, which must always be linked to the Sacrifice itself, is of inestimable value to the Church. Of the close relationship between the altar and the Sacrament reserved in the tabernacle, Pope Pius XII said “An awareness of their unity is more important than a realization of their differences. It is one and the same Lord who is immolated on the altar and honoured in the tabernacle, and who pours out his blessings from the tabernacle.”²

Although the altar deserves ritual and symbolic primacy during the Sacred Liturgy, the placement of the tabernacle in the sanctuary in no way detracts from the celebration of the Eucharist. Indeed, if the tabernacle is significantly isolated from the place of the ordinary public celebration of Holy Mass, then there is the possibility that the Real Presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament will gradually slip from the people’s consciousness.

According to the Third General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the tabernacle in which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved should be located in a part of the church that is truly prominent and readily visible. The Instruction explains that this means either in the sanctuary, not excluding an altar no longer used for celebration, or in a chapel readily visible to the Christian faithful (nn. 314 and 315). The determination of the positioning of the tabernacle is entrusted to the judgment of the diocesan Bishop as moderator of the liturgical life of the Church entrusted to his care.³

In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted the importance of locating the tabernacle in a prominent place: “The correct positioning of the tabernacle contributes to the recognition of Christ's real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Therefore, the place where the Eucharistic species are reserved, marked by a sanctuary lamp, should be readily visible to everyone entering the church” (n.69).

¹ Credo of the People of God (June 30, 1968).

² Address to the International Congress on Pastoral Liturgy, *Praesentia Christi* (September 22, 1956).

³ Canon 385.



B. Norms for the Archdiocese of Vancouver

The following norms are promulgated as particular law for the Archdiocese of Vancouver, effective February 2, 2010, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple.

1. The tabernacle is to be located in an elevated position in the sanctuary of the church, along the central axis behind the main altar. Where a high altar with a tabernacle remains in place, it is appropriate to use it for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament.
2. This prescription is to be observed in all future construction or restoration projects involving places of sacred worship in the Archdiocese.
3. In those places where the tabernacle is currently located elsewhere, a consultation with the Archdiocesan Liturgy Commission should begin within a year of the promulgation of this particular law regarding the possibility of moving the tabernacle to a position along the central axis behind the main altar.
4. Any request for an exception to the above norms must clearly demonstrate that it is a worthy alternative, one which would accentuate the sacramental nature of the church building and contribute to the spiritual life of the worshipping community, and must be approved by the Archbishop.
5. These norms apply to all parish churches; they do not apply to separate chapels of adoration.

Approved: 2010-January-12
Feast of Saint Marguerite Bourgeoys

+ J. Michael Miller CSB

† J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver