

Letter from Cardinal Collins: COVID-19 Provincial Measures



November 20, 2020

To all clergy, staff and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto,
Before providing an update on the latest measures implemented by the province of Ontario regarding churches in the Archdiocese of Toronto, I wish to express my gratitude and admiration for the heroic work that has taken place following our June re-opening.

Since that time, more than 1.3 million Catholics have attended Mass in our archdiocese. Following our robust WorshipSafe protocols, clergy, staff and volunteers have created a safe and welcoming environment, ensured proper distancing, the use of masks, as well as sanitizing churches after every service. You have also reached out with creativity and love to care not only for the sick and bereaved, but also for the needs of those suffering in other ways, who are isolated, who are facing psychological and spiritual trauma. You have been there for them. I thank you for fostering a culture of compassion that is needed more than ever, in the midst of this pandemic.

Participation in the Mass and especially the opportunity to receive the Eucharist and other sacraments gives all of us the spiritual strength to not only endure the crisis, but also to reach out to serve, day after day, all of those who are suffering.

We also must recognize the gravity of the situation before us. The number of positive cases of COVID-19 continues to rise at an alarming rate in many areas of our own archdiocese and in other regions of the province and country. We are still in the midst of a pandemic, which has already taken the lives of more than 11,000 Canadians.

We are grateful to those who have been dedicated to fighting the virus – first responders and front line workers along with those working selflessly in our long-term care homes among others. In my conversations with political leaders and medical officers of health, I continue to assure them of our ongoing prayers as they make difficult decisions to protect all of us.

In view of all of the above, I am deeply disappointed that, in some regions of the archdiocese, we must restrict participation in the sacraments (details enclosed). This will inflict a great spiritual pain upon those who safely and with great dedication have been drawing spiritual strength to sustain them, and to help them to serve those suffering in this pandemic. As we have demonstrated our ability to safely worship together, I trust that we will soon be able fully to resume public worship.

Meanwhile, now is the time to go ever deeper in prayer, and with continued love and creative zeal, build up our community of faith and reach out even more to those who are suffering in these difficult days.

Sincerely in Christ,
Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto

Recognizing the health and safety measures announced by the Province of Ontario on November 20, 2020, I am directing parishes to implement the following in their respective regions:

Toronto & Peel Region (Lockdown – Emergency Restrictions)

- **By Monday, November 23, 2020**, parishes must restrict attendance inside the church to 10 people, including priests hearing confessions or a staff member/volunteer required to monitor capacity restrictions. Due to these measures, public Masses must be temporarily cancelled. Priests are asked to celebrate private Mass daily for the intentions of parishioners and for those suffering from COVID-19.
- Churches, wherever possible and according to the judgement of the pastor, are encouraged to remain open for private prayer and for the faithful to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Weddings, funerals and baptisms (without Mass) are restricted to 10 persons, including those who are involved in ministry (priest, cantor, etc.). First Holy Communions and confirmations should be postponed at this time.
- Parishioners are encouraged to view online/livestream/televised Masses. A full list is available at www.archtoronto.org and I will continue to celebrate the livestreamed Mass each day from St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica at 7:30 a.m.
- No meetings should take place in parish halls or other church spaces at this time. The only exception would be those deemed as essential services eg. Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous Meetings. These meetings should be restricted to 10 people and ensure that all appropriate health and safety measures are in place (use of masks, hand sanitizer, physical distancing, etc.). Virtual meetings should replace in-person meetings wherever possible.
- Parish offices should move to Phase 1 – Parish Offices Closed/Significant Operating Restrictions. Only essential staff in the office. Employees should work remotely wherever possible. Parish offices closed to the public – limited essential appointments only. Staff should take direction from the pastor regarding the local situation on the most prudent approach. In larger parishes, it may be possible to rotate staff.

York & Durham Regions (Red Zone – Control Restrictions)

- **By Monday, November 23, 2020**, parishes must restrict attendance at all liturgical celebrations (Mass, weddings, funerals, baptisms, First Holy Communions, confirmation, etc.) to 30% capacity. Please continue to ensure strict adherence to sanitization, distancing and other measures as outlined in our protocols.
- No meetings should take place in parish halls or other church spaces at this time. The only exception would be those deemed as essential services eg. Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous Meetings. These meetings should be restricted to 10 people and ensure that all appropriate health and safety measures are in place (use of masks, hand sanitizer, physical distancing, etc.). Virtual meetings should replace in-person meetings wherever possible.

- Parish offices should move to Phase 2 – Limited Operations.

Simcoe Muskoka & Orangeville (Orange Zone – Restrict Measures)

- No change to current operations. Parishes must restrict attendance at all liturgical celebrations to 30% capacity.
- Indoor meetings restricted to 50 people maximum.