

February 24, 2021



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Lent is a penitential season in which, each year, we prepare ourselves for the celebration of Easter by following the call of Jesus to engage in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. This past year of pandemic has itself been a kind of penitential season, forcing us to consider our human fragility, and the stark fact of sickness and death. Many people have experienced great privation, which has come uninvited, and not as a penitential choice. And yet, just as the voluntary penances of Lent can lead us to a deeper appreciation of our human frailty – the fact that we are dust and to dust we shall return - and of our need for God, so too we pray that these involuntary privations may be experienced in a way that will lead not to fruitless anger, but to a deeper self awareness, and to compassion for our neighbours who are suffering.

Especially in a time of crisis, our sacramental life is essential. Here is an update on the operation of churches in the Archdiocese of Toronto. As of this writing, the following restrictions remain in effect for places of worship in the archdiocese:

- **Durham Region, Simcoe County, Orangeville and York Region churches** – these areas have returned to the “Red” (Control) designation, as determined by the Province of Ontario. This permits churches in these regions to operate sacramental celebrations at 30% capacity.
- **Toronto and Peel Region churches** – the province, in consultation with local medical officers of health, has extended the stay-at-home order in these regions until at least March 8, 2021, restricting places of worship to no more than 10 people (including the celebrant) in the church at any given time.

I am heartened that public Masses have returned to more than 35% of our parishes. Where this is not yet possible, I have asked all parishes to remain open each day for a period of private prayer. Permission has also been granted to parishes in these regions to continue to offer Holy Communion services on the weekend. Please check with your local parish regarding their current schedule.

I am grateful for the many sacrifices that you have made over the past 11 months. Throughout the pandemic, out of love for neighbour, in an effort to minimize the transmission of Covid-19, we have followed the health authorities’ direction on significant restrictions, limiting the ability of the faithful to gather. This has resulted in great spiritual sacrifice and pain for all of us, and especially for those who are isolated and vulnerable.

Despite temporary restrictions, we need to worship together, and to return to our full sacramental life as soon as is possible. We continue to urge that places of worship be treated equitably by the province; for example, it is only fair that there be a consistent approach to restrictions as they relate to retail businesses and to places of worship. Recently, a coalition of faith leaders has written to Premier Ford, highlighting the essential nature of in-person communal worship and spiritual support. If the government does not address these issues sufficiently, we will be asking for your assistance in contacting our elected officials to amplify our voices.

Once again, thank you for the sacrifices you have made. We pray for those who have died and for those who are sick, as we pray that this pandemic may soon come to an end. May God continue to bless you.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto