



March 13, 2020

To the faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

In light of the present situation unfolding before us regarding the coronavirus (COVID-19) worldwide, our primary concern is the spiritual and physical health and welfare of the faithful and of all those who serve at our parishes, recognizing that we also have a duty to care for the community at large and the most vulnerable among us.

We have provided several updates over the past six weeks, guided by the best advice from local health officials. In all of this, we are guided both by our commitment to cooperate effectively with the civic officials responsible for the common good and also by our commitment to provide for the spiritual well-being of the faithful in our Catholic community. We need to care for others and to respond to these challenges with accurate and credible information.

The Chief Medical Officer of the Province of Ontario is asking that all public gatherings greater than 250 people be cancelled at this time. For this reason, as many of our weekend Eucharistic celebrations will exceed this number, I ask that our Catholic parishes cancel public Mass for the faithful this weekend; we will assess this decision for next weekend and any other that is required after consulting health officials. For this weekend and any other which may be required, I grant the faithful dispensation from their Sunday obligation. Churches should remain open for private prayer and Eucharistic Adoration. Daily Mass will continue during the week.

The Holy Eucharist is the source and summit of our life in Christ. Not to celebrate the Holy Eucharist on the day of the Lord is an extraordinary spiritual suffering for the disciples of Jesus Christ. Indeed, in ancient times, the Christians had a saying, “Without the Sunday Eucharist, we cannot continue.” For this reason, while we are following the advice of the health authorities, as is our civic duty, we hope that this period of suspension will be brief.

We are asking parishes to adopt the following measures in addition to those that have already been communicated:

Mass Attendance

During this period of special vigilance, the following points apply for weekday Masses at the present time and for weekend Masses, when they are resumed:

- In a spirit of charity, concern for others and to limit the potential spread of COVID-19, I ask that those who are sick, feeling unwell or vulnerable to sickness, refrain from attending Mass at present.
- A daily televised Mass is available through Salt & Light Catholic Media Foundation (www.saltandlighttv.org) as well as through VisionTV and also online (www.DailyTVMass.com). This provides an additional opportunity to pray for those who are suffering as well as for our health care professionals tending the sick.
- At this time, weekday parish Mass schedules should remain unchanged to allow the faithful to receive the sacraments and to be strengthened in their commitment to care for others. We will continue to communicate with health officials in the days to come to receive the most reliable and accurate information which is the foundation for our actions.

Liturgical Practices

- We ask that parishes empty all Holy Water fonts until further notice.
- Extraordinary Ministers should not receive the Precious Blood prior to the distribution of communion. As previously directed, Extraordinary Ministers should ensure hands are washed or cleansed with hand sanitizer both before and after distribution.
- Regarding Holy Communion, some health experts have indicated that it is preferable for communicants to receive the Eucharist in the hand rather than on the tongue. To respect the right of the faithful to receive Holy Communion on the tongue, at this time I would ask that all those who wish to receive in this way be directed to a designated priest, deacon, or Extraordinary Minister. Where there is only the priest present for distribution of Holy Communion, those who wish to receive communion on the tongue can be invited to come forward after those who have received on the hand.
- In response to concerns raised by some parishes regarding the offertory, we discourage passing of the basket. Parishes should use baskets with handles, if they are available, or have ushers with baskets at the back of the church where parishioners can deposit their donations.
- As I have previously requested, parishioners are asked to refrain from shaking hands during the Sign of Peace. Distribution of the Precious Blood is suspended at this time.

Parish Events & Pastoral Care

- Archdiocesan and parish offices remain open at this time for the service of the people. Hospital and nursing home visits will be subject to the norms instituted by those respective institutions. People should not attend parish activities of any kind if they are sick, vulnerable, or unwell.
- Parishes should encourage staff to practice healthy hygiene while taking steps to sanitize public spaces and “touch points” more frequently. Washing with soap and water for a sufficient amount of time is highly recommended.
- During this time, when there is understandable anxiety among so many, the church has an important role to play through our outreach ministries. Particular care should be taken to ensure that the vulnerable are not alone. Parishes should explore opportunities to creatively connect with vulnerable parishioners - perhaps this is through phone calls and/or visits where appropriate.

While challenging days remain, we must also recognize the opportunity to be truly present to one another and to care for those who are struggling. These moments of uncertainty call each one of us to renew our commitment to prayer, fasting and almsgiving as part of our Lenten journey, amplified on a broader scale in light of current circumstances. May we continue to pray for all those infected with COVID-19, those caring for the sick and for one another.

May God bless you always.

In Christ,

† Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto