



July 28, 2021

3 pages via e-mail

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

As you are aware, we are presently in Step 3 of the provincial “Roadmap for Reopening”. The number of new COVID-19 cases has reduced significantly over the past month and almost 70% of adults in Ontario are fully vaccinated. While we are not in a position, at present, to welcome the faithful at full capacity and to lift all restrictions, we are moving much closer to that reality.

After careful review of current restrictions, the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO), in consultation with medical experts involved in the creation of the WorshipSafe guidelines, has updated current protocols, relaxing a number of measures that have been in place over the past year. In the Archdiocese of Toronto, I ask that you continue with existing measures and implement the relaxed norms noted below as soon as possible:

Ongoing Measures

- Regarding spiritual services and activities held on church property, physical distancing of two metres (six feet) remains at this time unless members are from the same household.
- By-laws remain in place requiring the use of a face mask in public spaces indoors.
- A cantor may sing at Mass as long as the cantor is a minimum of three metres (ten feet) distant from anyone else while singing. In a church where physical distancing can be ensured between choir members, then such a choir is possible but only if the choir members are a minimum of three metres (ten feet) from one another and any other person in the Church.
- Communion procedures are unchanged despite the lessening of restrictions in other areas. Both the person distributing communion and the communicant must be fully masked. Once the communicant receives the Eucharist, they are to move two metres (six feet) away, safely remove their mask, consume the Eucharist, replace their mask, and then proceed back to their pew. We anticipate a return to communion on the tongue shortly but at present, we ask that communion continue to be distributed in the hand.
- The Sign of Peace is maintained. A simple bow of the head toward one’s neighbour may be offered in lieu of the shaking of hands.
- Holy Water fonts at church entrances should not be filled at this time.
- The preference continues that confessions should be heard outside of the Confessional to allow for proper distancing. Where Confessionals are used, both priest and confessor should wear masks. Priests may wish to double mask or use an N-95 mask so as to further lower the risk of infection.
- Parishes should ensure they have the ability to communicate with parishioners should there be a positive COVID-19 case in their community. For those using reservation systems, contact information is available. Parishes may also use FlockNote, e-mail, parish website or other tools to communicate with parishioners in the event of a positive case. Sign-in sheets with contact information should be used for groups renting church halls or other facilities.



Relaxed Measures

- **NEW** - Baptisms of more than one child outside of Mass are now permitted. However, the presider must bless the holy water in a pitcher or other vessel that can be poured on the candidate's head, rather than baptizing each candidate with the same water. Also, the presider should sanitize his hands after making direct contact with each child.
- **NEW** - Cleaning procedures for pews, washrooms, confessionals, reconciliation rooms are relaxed so as to require only regular cleaning in accordance with routines prior to Covid-19 restrictions. The only exception is where someone attending church has a suspected case or tested positive for Covid-19, in which case the space should be disinfected as per pandemic related protocols.
- **NEW** - Missals and prayer books may be replaced in pews. Please do not return hymnals to pews at this time as congregational singing is not yet permitted.
- **NEW** - Bulletins, envelopes, pamphlets, and newspapers may again be distributed as per pre-COVID-19 practices.
- **NEW** - Votive candle areas may be re-opened. Physical distancing of two metres (six feet) should be observed wherever possible.
- **NEW** - Crying Rooms and Small Chapels/Devotional Areas may be used again as long as proper distancing is maintained.
- **NEW** - Collections may again be taken up using baskets in the traditional fashion. All Ushers involved in the collection should ensure that they wear masks while undertaking this task and make every effort to ensure physical distancing of two metres (six feet).
- **NEW** - Hand Sanitizing – it is no longer mandatory for all entering a church to use hand sanitizer, though churches, especially as we move into the fall and winter months, are encouraged to provide hand sanitizers as a best practice. Clergy and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion should continue to use hand-sanitizers before and after the distribution of the Eucharist.
- **NEW** - Altar servers may resume serving on the altar (wearing masks) and maintaining two metres (six feet) distance between each other and the priest as much as possible. Altar servers from the same household do not need to maintain physical distancing.
- **NEW** - Children's liturgies may resume where appropriate.
- **NEW** – Clergy are now permitted to travel in accordance with provincial and federal guidelines.



Reminders

- Meetings in parish halls or other indoor spaces are permitted in Step 3. Attendance may not exceed 50% of meeting space capacity. Participants must be masked and physically distanced – 2 metres (6 ft.) between those not from the same household. In addition, a sign-in sheet for meetings should be provided for the purposes of contact tracing. Meals or food service at meetings is discouraged at this time.
- Outdoor social gatherings and public events (non-religious services) are permitted with a maximum of 100 people.
- Livestreaming of services should continue where this practice is underway and the dispensation from the Sunday obligation continues. The elderly and those with compromised immune systems or other health conditions should be encouraged to exercise caution about any outings, including attendance at church. Virtual meetings may still replace in-person meetings where appropriate.
- Please continue to take great care in implementing robust health and safety measures in the rectory and office. In addition to keeping our parishioners safe, every measure should be taken to protect our clergy, essential staff and any volunteers who are required to assist at this time. As parishes begin to offer more public operating hours, where distancing is not possible, mask use should be employed in office settings or in dealing with the public.

Thank you for your ongoing co-operation to foster a healthy and safe environment for parishioners, clergy and staff. We will continue to keep you updated and pray that additional restrictions may be lifted shortly.

Sincerely in Christ,

† Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto