



February 10, 2021

2 pages via email

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

As communicated earlier this week, the province is moving out of the “state of emergency” and returning to regional restrictions, using the colour-coded framework, similar to what was done before the province-wide lockdown. To be clear, the situation remains serious with new variants of Covid-19 present in Ontario, spreading quickly throughout the community.

At the time of this communication, the province has not announced the restrictions or colour-coded designations for regions of the Archdiocese of Toronto. I also recognize that with Ash Wednesday a week away, there is a need for additional direction regarding the path forward. Based on the latest information, we can anticipate the following:

Toronto, Peel & York Regions

These regions will not be returning to the provincial framework until February 22, 2021. For this reason, they should continue to move forward with plans for Ash Wednesday liturgies as previously communicated, with a limit of no more than 10 people in the church, including the priest and those assisting with the liturgy. Churches may livestream services and are encouraged to be open each day for a period of private prayer.

Durham, Simcoe & Orangeville

These regions will be returning to the provincial framework on February 16, 2021. We anticipate these areas will either be in the Grey (Lockdown) or Red (Control) zone. If a region is in the Grey zone, the current restrictions (no more than 10 inside the church) remain in effect. If the area is placed into the Red zone, the 30% capacity restriction for places of worship will be employed.

An additional challenge is that the province has indicated it may be the end of the week or even early next week before they make an announcement regarding the classification of these regions. Recognizing the uncertainty, I recommend that parishes prepare two scenarios for next week:

- a) **If in the Grey Zone** - move forward with Holy Communion Services and the distribution of ashes observing the limit of 10 people inside the church. Parishes may also offer services via livestream and all are encouraged to have the church open each day for a period of private prayer.
- b) **If in the Red Zone** - public Masses and the distribution of ashes (using the method outlined previously – sprinkling of ashes over the head of those coming forward, etc.) are permitted for Ash Wednesday. If you are able to return to 30% capacity and therefore permitted to celebrate public Mass and find it pastorally appropriate to distribute ashes on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, on those three days, ashes may be distributed once the Mass is concluded. Parishes may also offer services via livestream. Note – if an announcement is not made until early next week, for practical purposes, parishes may need to move forward with Holy Communion Services if they are not able to communicate or organize volunteers by Ash Wednesday.



In areas where public Masses are permitted to resume, parishes should make every effort to begin to offer the public celebration of the Eucharist as soon as possible and when, at the discretion of the pastor, they can do so safely. A reminder that the WorshipSafe protocols must be in place. As previously directed, please note the change in the current WorshipSafe protocols regarding the cleaning of pews:

If a pew will not be used within an hour of the last occupancy, there should be no need to disinfect, though periodic regular cleaning should still continue. Where the pew is scheduled to be used within an hour of last occupancy, disinfection should consist of running a disinfectant-laden cloth along the tops and sides of each pew. This approach is likely to be sufficient to combat pathogens, and as more research is done, such requirements may be eventually be dispensed with.

Two other important points as we navigate the path forward:

- 1) As we have seen in the past, local municipalities may impose their own restrictions on top of what the province directs. We will communicate further if this is the case in any region.
- 2) The provincial framework has been relaxed to allow retail stores to open in lockdown regions with a percentage of capacity. I have communicated directly to Premier Ford along with other faith leaders that this same approach should follow with places of worship as opposed to a hard number, in this case, 10 people. If there are no changes, I will be releasing a public statement regarding this issue next week.

I very much recognize the fluid nature of the situation and appreciate your patience through these challenging days. We will continue to keep you updated as information becomes available. Thank you for all that you continue to do to serve the faithful.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto