

February 24, 2022

4 pages

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

I wish to extend my deep gratitude for your ministry during these almost two years of pandemic. These have been difficult and challenging days, but I am heartened by the witness and outreach exhibited by all of you in accompanying and caring for the Catholic community as we journeyed through this valley of tears. Please know that your work is deeply appreciated.

I have been clear throughout the pandemic that Covid-19 restrictions would only remain in place for as long as necessary. These restrictions have stayed with us for longer than we had hoped when we created the WorshipSafe protocols in the summer of 2020. While these measures have been challenging at times, it is clear that they have been effective in protecting the health and well-being of our parishioners, volunteers, staff and clergy. In particular, I thank the thousands of volunteers who helped to clean churches and assist with the many WorshipSafe guidelines while welcoming parishioners and maintaining a safe environment for all.

Thankfully, the vaccination rate in our province is high and the number of Covid cases with severe outcomes are declining. As a result, restrictions are gradually being lifted. As communicated earlier this week, beginning on Tuesday, March 1, 2022, capacity limits at our churches, including physical distancing requirements, will be removed.

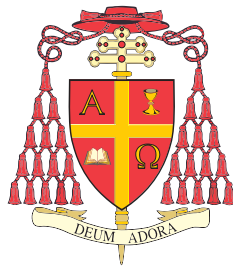
Masks will continue to be worn in our churches until directed otherwise by medical and health officials (as throughout the pandemic some limited medical exemptions may apply).

In consultation with medical officials, a number of other restrictions will also be lifted as of March 1, 2022 – please refer to the enclosure for additional details.

In all of our efforts, let us remember to serve those who need us. The pandemic has been a long, stressful time for many and we should expect that the faithful will have different responses to the removal of Covid restrictions, ranging from joy to fear. Concerns, and even conflict, may arise as these restrictions are removed. I also acknowledge that clergy or staff will experience these same feelings.

Some parishes may wish to gradually increase capacity while others may return to full capacity right away. I encourage pastors to exercise prudential judgement to meet the needs of their community while also providing access to the sacraments to as many as possible. Similarly, pastors will need to discern how best to return their office operations to normal. Kindness and charity should prevail in the way we encounter and dialogue with one another. In these times, the people of God will look to you for guidance.

It is providential that we have reached this point where these restrictions can be removed at the beginning of Lent. This time of preparation for Easter is an ideal moment for parishes to undertake special efforts to welcome the faithful home once again. Many parishioners have not been inside the church for some time and we need to think of creative, pastoral and thoughtful approaches to welcome them back.



The Eucharist remains the source and summit of our life in Christ. For Christians, participation in the Sunday Eucharist is the central experience of the week, and that is the foundation for the obligation of every Catholic to be personally present at Mass every Sunday. Of course, if there is a legitimate reason (such as being sick) this obligation does not apply. Similarly, when pandemic restrictions for the common good and love of neighbour have prevented attendance, then the obligation does not apply, and it is understandable as well that some may feel hesitant at first about returning to personal participation. But as the restrictions are lifted, now is the time to encourage Catholics to return to physical presence at Sunday Mass, if not impeded for a legitimate reason, in keeping with our basic Sunday obligation as Catholics.

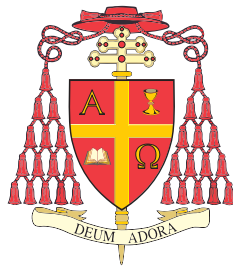
Further instructions on Holy Week liturgies will be distributed at a later date, but you should anticipate that most of our pre-pandemic practices will return for Holy Week. As part of this, I invite our priests to once again join me at St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica for the Chrism Mass.

Thank you again for your patience and dedication to fostering a safe environment over the past two years. Please know of my ongoing support and profound gratitude for all that you continue to do.

Sincerely in Christ,

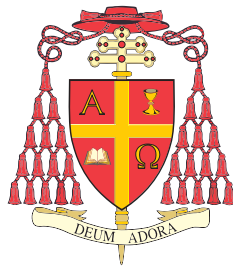
+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto



Updates to the WorshipSafe Protocols Taking Effect on Tuesday, March 1, 2022

- All capacity limits, including physical distancing requirements, are removed from churches and parish halls. Parishes can gradually begin to remove floor markings and other signage as restrictions are lifted. Parishes may wish to continue with distancing at Holy Communion as a best practice for a period of time, removing all floor markings and distancing at the discretion of the pastor.
- Indoor mask use is still required for those over the age of two (limited medical exemptions apply)
- Holy Communion on the tongue can resume, but those receiving Holy Communion on the tongue should ideally be at the end of the Communion line
- The kiss of peace is still discouraged at this time. A bow or wave should continue to be used as an alternative
- Holy water fonts can be refilled. Prayer books, hymnals, magazines, bulletins and votive candles can return to the church, if they have not already
- Altar servers and Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion can return to pre-pandemic duties
- Choirs and cantors still must be masked or three metres/nine feet from anyone else
- Reporting of rapid test results for unvaccinated clergy, staff and volunteers is suspended. Proof of vaccination is not a requirement to enter Archdiocese of Toronto churches
- Baptisms can return to pre-pandemic practices
- Confessionals and confession rooms can reopen, provided that both parties are masked
- Parish offices can resume operations in the manner that best suits the local conditions of that church, while respecting all normal applicable regulations, laws and archdiocesan policies
- The use of hand sanitizer upon entry to the church and before the distribution of Holy Communion remains a best practice and is encouraged. It is still recommended that health and hygiene signage remains posted in parishes at this time
- Meetings in parish halls may resume for those who may wish to do so – mask use is required
- Contact tracing and online Mass registration systems are no longer required. Parishioners should be encouraged to continue self-screening for Covid-19 symptoms and stay home if they have any symptoms



- Reporting all Covid cases is no longer required, but the regional bishops and Pastoral Centre staff are still available to answer Covid-related questions, help with the communication of serious incidents and arrange for visiting priests in the case of illness
- Parishes are encouraged to review updated procedures with volunteers and others who may be assisting with the celebration of the sacraments
- Parishes are encouraged to make an announcement at the beginning of Mass over the first several weeks of March 2022 noting the lifting of restrictions and reminders regarding updated procedures that may have changed