



2 pages via e-mail

December 17, 2020

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

I would like to provide an update on our archdiocesan plans for Christmas services. Over the past week, I have reached out directly to Premier Ford with a request to open all of our parishes at 30% capacity for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. As you know, since our re-opening in June with attendance of more than 1.5 million, we have experienced an extremely small number of positive Covid-19 cases. To our knowledge, none of these cases has been directly traced back to the church as the origin of transmission.

Unfortunately, this request has not been granted. There are a number of legal cases underway from places of worship and businesses arguing many of the same points that we have highlighted with the provincial government. It remains to be determined when and how those cases will unfold. At this time, we continue our ongoing dialogue with the province – if there are any significant developments, we will inform you immediately. However, in light of Christmas celebrations less than 10 days away, there is a need to provide direction on a path forward at this time.

Recognizing the essential nature of the Eucharist, the source and summit of our spiritual strength as Christians, and the importance of Christmas, we want to provide an opportunity for the faithful who wish to do so, to spend time, even if briefly, at their local parish and, where possible, to receive Holy Communion.

In lockdown regions, currently Toronto, Peel, and York, religious services are very limited, with no more than 10 people allowed.

Our faith is a source of hope and comfort during these challenging days of pandemic. Despite the restrictions we face, there are several ways of caring pastorally for the faithful:

Of course, all priests are **offering Mass for the people every day**, which is a basic dimension of the priestly office.

Although during this time, no Public Masses can be celebrated in the lockdown areas, many parishes are **livestreaming Mass**. This in no way is a substitute for the Eucharist, but it can be helpful spiritually to some extent, and is much to be encouraged. Parishes are especially encouraged to livestream Christmas Masses where possible or to direct the faithful to a listing of churches that are doing so – a full list can be found at: [www.archtoronto.org](http://www.archtoronto.org)

Another important spiritual support in these difficult days, as always, is that Churches remain open for **private prayer and Eucharistic Adoration** – observing the limits of 10 people in the church at anytime, including volunteers, etc. Parishes are especially encouraged to remain open for a period of private prayer and Eucharistic Adoration on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.



An additional possibility in the regions where Public Mass cannot be celebrated, is that for those parishes where the pastor determines that it is both safe and feasible to do so, on Christmas Eve beginning at 3 p.m. and also on Christmas Day, a **Holy Communion Service** may be offered to the faithful, with no more than 10 people inside the church (including the one leading the service). The number of these services and their frequency and schedule should be determined by the pastor. I have approved the attached service, which takes no more than 7 or 8 minutes. In these unique circumstances, this service may be led by a priest, deacon or extraordinary minister of Holy Communion. As the small group in attendance will be asked to stand, appropriately distanced, in front of the sanctuary, no cleaning of pews is required.

If you choose this option, please ensure that you schedule an appropriate amount of time between services to allow for the departure of one group and the entrance of the next one. Holy Communion Services may take place in the church only – multiple services may not be held in the hall or other spaces. For those parishes that wish to do this, online reservation systems are strongly encouraged to regulate attendance and allow for contact tracing.

Given that parishes will offer a variety of hours and options as noted above, it is critical that you utilize your local communication channels – website, email, robocall, app, phone tree, etc. to make your people aware of your plans.

For parishes in control (Red Zone) regions (Durham, Simcoe and Orangeville), there are no changes from what has been previously communicated. Sacramental celebrations may continue, limited to 30% capacity. However, these regions should be mindful of the options noted above. It has been suggested that other regions in the Greater Toronto Area may be placed into lockdown in the coming days. Parishes currently in the red zone should be prepared to adapt accordingly on short notice, once again, utilizing communication channels to do so.

We ask that the faithful make every effort to follow the direction of the Province of Ontario to not travel outside of their own region to places where public Christmas Masses may be available.

Thank you in advance for your incredible efforts to care for the faithful of our archdiocese. Be assured of my ongoing prayers and support.

Sincerely in Christ,

*† Thomas Card. Collins*

Thomas Cardinal Collins  
Archbishop of Toronto