



March 17, 2020

My dear faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

I wish to provide you with a further update on our response as a Christian community to the COVID-19 situation which is evolving rapidly. Today, the Premier of Ontario has declared a state of emergency.

Once again in the history of our archdiocese we are in the midst of an epidemic. I am deeply grateful for the priests, deacons and lay pastoral workers of the archdiocese who have acted in this emergency with such loving pastoral care.

We are called to ensure that this continues even more in the time ahead. For example, I encourage all pastors to organize the members of their parish to assist those who are isolated and vulnerable, especially the elderly, while always following the directions of the health authorities.

For the duration of this health emergency, I decree that the following be implemented in all parishes, missions and chaplaincies throughout the Archdiocese of Toronto:

**Mass** – In view of the requirements of the Government of Ontario, during this medical emergency, beginning Tuesday, March 17, 2020, I instruct that all public Masses be cancelled, both during the week and on the weekend. Churches will be available for individual private prayer. The priests of the archdiocese will celebrate Mass every day privately for the intentions of the people.

The faithful will be able to watch, [via livestream](#), a Mass which will be celebrated every day at 7:30 a.m. at St. Michael's Cathedral Basilica, which will be followed by the Angelus and the Rosary. I will personally celebrate this Mass as much as is possible.

This Mass, Rosary and Angelus will also be available on the [Archdiocese of Toronto's YouTube channel](#) for those who cannot join at 7:30 a.m. These Masses and prayers will be offered for the intentions of everyone as we go through these trying times. In addition, Mass will be broadcast daily on [Salt & Light Catholic Media Foundation](#), [VisionTV \(Daily TV Mass\)](#) and [EWTN](#).

So many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world are deprived of the opportunity to celebrate the Holy Eucharist, for many reasons. Due to this health emergency we also will now experience their suffering. Perhaps this sacrifice will help us to cherish more profoundly the great gift of the Holy Eucharist. There is no substitute for personally participating in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the source and summit of our life in Christ, and we pray for the time when this may be universally available once more.

It is important to follow carefully the provisions of the health authorities, but it also essential that our spiritual life be enhanced and strengthened all the more during this crisis. At this time, when we are reminded of the brevity of life and of our own mortality, we are called to go deeper to our spiritual foundations.

I encourage all people who remain at home and who are cut off from regular social interaction to engage in prayer – to pray the Rosary, to read the Scriptures and to offer prayers for those who are suffering the most in this crisis.

We should also pray for the health care workers and others who are engaged in fighting this pandemic on the frontlines.

**Baptism** – At this time, communal celebrations of Baptism are not allowed. Individual Baptism is allowed with immediate family and following the regulations established by the health authorities.

**RCIA** – I dispense the catechumens from the scrutinies. Information will be sent out later on the Triduum and reception into the Church.

**First Holy Communion, First Reconciliation and Confirmation** will be postponed for the duration of the emergency.

**Sacrament of Reconciliation** – Communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Reconciliation are not allowed at this time. All those who wish to receive the sacrament should contact a priest. The sacrament is to be celebrated not in a confessional but rather in another location, where confidentiality may be ensured and where the distance required by the health officials can be maintained.

**Marriage** – Marriages without Mass may take place with the immediate family members, provided they follow the regulations established by the health authorities. The postponement of the wedding may be requested given these circumstances, but if this is granted there may be a need for revision of the canonical requirements.

**Marriage Preparation** is very important. At this time, however, marriage preparation classes are cancelled and pastors are to arrange for individual couples to be prepared properly for marriage.

**Visits to the Sick and Homebound** should continue as much as possible. As previously communicated, visiting clergy and volunteers should take direction from the health care facility. Parishes should also take care to contact the homebound and vulnerable.

**Funerals** – During this emergency, there will be no vigils or wake services. The Rite of Committal will take place with the immediate family at the cemetery. There will be no funeral Mass at this time, but we encourage the celebration of a funeral Mass at a later date when it is possible.

**Parish Meetings and Events** are cancelled at this time.

**Parish Offices** – While parish offices may offer more limited operating hours, they should maintain an active presence in the community and be accessible to the faithful. Parishes are encouraged to follow the direction of the Archdiocese of Toronto's Human Resources department, providing flexibility for staff as appropriate. The Archdiocese of Toronto's Catholic Pastoral Centre will also follow this practice, ensuring that offices remain accessible.



We will review our emergency provisions regularly in accord with the requirements of the public health officials and we will provide updates at: [www.archtoronto.org/covid19](http://www.archtoronto.org/covid19).

While it is a painful moment in the life of the Church to take these extreme measures, we pray that they will aid in combating the pandemic that has affected so many in our own community and around the world.

Once again, we pray for those suffering and for those who are caring for the sick. We are facing many trials during our Lenten journey this year. We take these to prayer, and look for opportunities to be the face of Jesus to all those whom we encounter. May God continue to bless you.

In Christ,

*† Thomas Card. Collins*

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Archbishop of Toronto