



March 12, 2021

2 pages via e-mail plus 1 attachment

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

Earlier today, the provincial government announced changes to the restrictions on places of worship currently in the Grey (Lockdown) Zone. As of Monday, March 15, 2021, churches in this designation (in the archdiocese, currently Toronto and Peel Regions) will be permitted 15 per cent capacity for religious services. The percentage includes anyone assisting with the service (priest, volunteers, etc.).

This is a significant improvement from the hard cap of 10 people that has been in place for several months and it is a more balanced approach in light of the relaxed restrictions in other sectors. As you all know, with distancing measures in place, the true maximum capacity for most churches is in the 15-25 per cent range. It is also important to note that this amended capacity will be in place should any region need to return to the Grey (Lockdown) designation in the future. We see no reason why local municipalities will not respect these new guidelines. If the situation changes for any reason, we will provide further updates.

A week ago, we launched the “A Place to Worship” campaign, inviting the faithful to contact their Member of Provincial Parliament to ask for a fair and balanced approach to restrictions for places of worship. More than 13,000 letters were written, with 80 per cent sent within 48 hours of the request. I am grateful to all those who participated in the campaign.

Earlier this week, a diverse group of faith leaders had the opportunity to meet virtually with Premier Ford, Minister Elliott and Dr. Williams to discuss our concerns. I wish to extend my profound gratitude to the provincial government for sharing generously of their time and for the healthy dialogue that was exchanged. I know that many Members of Provincial Parliament also advocated for a just and equitable approach for places of worship, on behalf of their constituents, and I thank them as well.

We now shift our focus to the practical matter of adjusting to the updated restrictions:

Toronto and Peel Region

As of Monday, March 15, 2021, Toronto and Peel will be subject to the amended restrictions. For sacramental celebrations, churches are permitted 15 per cent capacity. For funerals, please see further direction on page two. To determine your church’s capacity (using the hall for Mass in the Grey Zone is not permitted), please see the attached file, recognizing that physical distancing of seating must also be maintained. Shortly, we will also send updated guidance on staffing safeguards.

I ask that all parishes once again begin to celebrate public Masses as soon as they are certain they can implement our [WorshipSafe health and safety protocols](#), as early as March 15, 2021 and no later than Thursday, March 18, 2021. Holy Communion services should be discontinued after Sunday, March 14, 2021.

A few very important additional points:

- The Grey (Lockdown) Zones are still very much the areas where positive cases of Covid-19 are highest in the province. For the safety of all, it is imperative that each parish ensure all WorshipSafe guidelines are clearly followed to protect parishioners, clergy and staff.



- In particular, health officials have expressed concern regarding the faithful congregating in or around the church before or after services in large numbers. This point should be communicated to parishioners – arrival and dismissal should be co-ordinated in such a fashion to ensure large groups do not congregate. Particular attention should be directed to weddings, funerals and baptisms.
- Livestreaming of services should continue where this practice is underway and the dispensation from the Sunday Eucharist continues. The elderly, those with compromised immune systems or other health conditions should be encouraged to exercise extreme caution about any outings, including attendance at church.

Funerals in Grey (Lockdown) Regions

Please note that for funerals, at present, the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO) has indicated that funeral home staff will not be permitted to assist inside a church if there are more than 10 people present in the Grey Zone. If attendance exceeds that number, funeral home staff have been directed by the BAO to place the casket at the church entrance and return to their vehicles. Upon completion of the service, church personnel/family are to return the casket to the hearse for delivery to the cemetery.

Parishes wishing to use funeral home services in the Grey Zone must limit capacity to 10 people or if they choose to have 15 per cent capacity, they need to make arrangements noted above. Based on today's announcement, we expect that the BAO will adjust their capacity restrictions accordingly – we will provide any updates as appropriate. Parishes should also dialogue with their local funeral home prior to making arrangements with families for additional clarity.

Durham, York, Simcoe & Orangeville

These regions remain in the Red (Control) Zone where 30 per cent capacity is permitted. Today's announcement does not affect these regions.

Be assured of my ongoing gratitude for your prayers and pastoral support of the faithful.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto