



September 24, 2021

To all clergy and staff of the Archdiocese of Toronto,

I wish to extend my ongoing gratitude to all of you as I know that the last 18 months have been challenging both personally and pastorally. I continue to keep you all close in prayer.

I recognize that the restrictions we have all faced and continue to experience are frustrating and, at times, have been the cause of anxiety and division. There is a tension in our country that is palpable and we continue to pray for the day that we may return to daily life without the restrictions that remain in place, especially those that impede our ability to welcome full and active participation in our sacramental celebrations.

We also acknowledge that we are still navigating an unpredictable global pandemic and these restrictions, while frustrating, remind us of the call to love and care for our neighbour as ourselves.

Organizations, businesses and institutions throughout the province have been asked to implement a vaccination policy. Enclosed you will find our policies for staff, volunteers and clergy. I wish to highlight some key points for reflection:

- I very strongly urge every Catholic to become fully vaccinated, though we will make every effort to ensure places of worship remain open and accessible to all, regardless of vaccination status. The church should serve as a respite, a sanctuary of peace, prayer and welcome. We are heartened to see that the provincial government has not required proof of vaccination to enter a place of worship.
- We must also maintain a safe working environment. Clergy, staff and volunteers have the greatest person-to-person interaction in parish/office settings and thus, a heightened risk for transmission of Covid-19. To ensure a safe workplace and to welcome the faithful with an additional level of health and safety, on a temporary basis, we are asking that clergy, staff and volunteers be fully vaccinated or be subject to regular rapid tests.
- Regarding vaccination against Covid-19, the direction of the Holy Father, Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) and my own communication has been to ask people to be vaccinated to minimize the potential transmission of Covid-19. The congregation states that this must be done freely and also reminds us that *“the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one’s own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good.”*

As we reflect on pursuing the common good and care for one another, I would like to communicate directly to our clergy (bishops, priests, deacons) as well as religious men and women and seminarians serving in ministry in the archdiocese:

I urge those that have not been fully vaccinated to do so as soon as possible.

Due to requirements from the provincial government and organizational policies in many institutions, your ability to serve the faithful will be significantly impeded should you choose not to be vaccinated. This will restrict your ministry in schools, hospitals, long-term care homes and other settings requiring full vaccination. We know that these visits and your ongoing pastoral care in these settings are important aspects of your ministry.



Many of you are living in community with others, including those who may be elderly or with more significant health challenges. Staff or volunteers in the rectory or office may also be at greater risk depending on their circumstances. In short, we have a responsibility to ensure a safe environment for staff and volunteers. Vaccination remains the best defence against infection for oneself or others. Should you choose not to be vaccinated, regular weekly rapid tests (as outlined in the policy) will be required.

One fact is abundantly clear: most of the new Covid-19 infections, by far, are among those who are not vaccinated. It is quite understandable that for this reason the provincial government has made it clear that any reduction of restrictions will depend on a greater percentage of the population being fully vaccinated. We have also seen, in recent days, a significant surge in new cases and deaths, particularly in Alberta. Intensive care units have been overwhelmed and new restrictions have been instituted, including those affecting places of worship. I pray that we will not experience this situation in Ontario. We must get beyond this pandemic, which has directly and indirectly caused such misery for so many, and has impeded our life as a Christian community. The single best way to do that is for people to get vaccinated.

Most importantly, I care deeply about each one of you and all those who serve the church. I do not want you to contract Covid-19 or transmit it to others, especially in the midst of one of the most serious health care crises of our lifetime. I recognize that some of you may have concerns regarding vaccination. If this is the case, please speak to your doctor or, if you have ethical concerns, refer to information available from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute or contact them directly. Specific questions on the policy can also be directed to your Regional Bishop, the Chancellor of Spiritual Affairs or Human Resources.

Once again, I am grateful for all that you continue to do and I know that you share my fervent desire to return to a restriction free environment as soon as possible. I ask for your co-operation as we implement the vaccination policy in the coming days. I pray that we may serve faithfully and lovingly, caring for all those we encounter.

May you continue to be blessed with good health and be assured of my prayers for you and the faithful of the Archdiocese of Toronto.

Sincerely in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins

Thomas Cardinal Collins
Archbishop of Toronto