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Date: March 11, 2022  
To: Parishes, priests and deacons  
From: Fr. Dan Van Delst, Chancellor  
Re: Province of Ontario – Religious services changes to COVID Safety Guidelines – March 21

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On March 9, 2022, the Ontario Chief Medical Officer of Health announced effective Monday, March 21, 2022, the end of public masking requirements except in select settings such as public transit, health care settings, long-term care homes and congregate care settings. As such, our churches, halls and offices will also no longer require masking starting on March 21, 2022.

This change will be stressful for some members of our community. The transition to masks becoming optional may make some parishioners feel anxious. Some will choose to continue wearing a mask in churches, halls and offices, and they should not be discouraged from doing so. How we manage different attitudes to mask wearing will require understanding and patience as we each deal with our own comfort levels and particular health challenges. The important thing is to respect where each person is in their journey.

The archbishop is extending the dispensation from attending Mass in person on Sunday until the vigil Mass for Palm Sunday, April 09<sup>th</sup>, in time for the Holy Week liturgies. Beginning on Palm Sunday, parishioners are invited once again to attend Mass in person unless for reasons of health they cannot do so at this time. I remind all Catholics that the obligation to attend Sunday Mass does not apply if for health reasons you cannot attend Mass in person.

In this time of transition, I encourage parishes to reassess their need to continue live-streaming the Mass or not. It is important to convey the message that attending Mass in person to receive the sacraments is the integral way of practising our faith. At the same time, some of your parishioners who are homebound because of illness and whose only connection to the life of the parish is through live-streaming might truly appreciate this ongoing service. Pastors are called to discern with their parish councils how they can best serve their faithful.

During Lent, as we prepare to celebrate the pivotal moments of our faith, please make a special effort to welcome the faithful back to church and do everything you can to ensure people have positive experiences when they return to our parishes.

**Religious services changes to COVID Safety Guidelines taking effect on Monday, March 21, 2022**

- Indoor mask use no longer required.

- Parishioners should be encouraged to continue self-screening for Covid-19 symptoms and stay home if they have any symptoms.
- COVID prevention signs may be removed from entrances.
- The use of hand sanitizer upon entry and exit of the church remains a best practice and is encouraged.
- Holy Communion on the tongue can resume.
- The Greeting of Peace can be restored.
- Holy water fonts can be refilled. Prayer books, hymnals, magazines, bulletins and votive candles can return to the church if they have not already.
- Choirs and cantors and all who assist at Mass can return without restrictions.
- Confessionals and confession rooms can reopen without restrictions.
- Churches should always be clean and tidy.
- Parishes are encouraged to make an announcement at the beginning of Mass over the first couple of weeks after March 21, 2022, noting the lifting of restrictions.

Should you have any questions, please contact the Chancery.