



Archdiocese of Vancouver
ARCHBISHOP'S OFFICE

February 23, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

I pray that your Lenten Season has begun well and that it will be a source of many blessings for you and your family.

As you know, on November 19, 2020, the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, issued an Order which included a prohibition on religious gatherings for a period of nearly three weeks. This Order was extended in December and again in January, and then, most recently, it was extended indefinitely on February 5, 2021. As a result, our priests have been unable to offer Holy Mass with a congregation, despite the precautions that we had previously taken to combat the spread of COVID-19.

As Easter approaches, I want to assure you that the Archdiocese is taking steps to advocate with the Provincial Government for a safe return to in-person attendance at Mass. It is my ardent hope that we can return from our extended “fast” from the Eucharist and join together to celebrate the Lord’s Resurrection this Easter.

I am very grateful for the way that Catholics of the Archdiocese have respected the health Orders of the Provincial Government, while continuing to follow the livestreaming of Mass from our parishes. Like most British Columbians, Catholics are making a great many sacrifices to follow the Orders of the Provincial Health Officer, in order to curb the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, and will continue to do so as good citizens who care for the welfare of their neighbours.

While we respect the measures taken by Government to protect the health of British Columbians, we want to be assured that the Orders are being fairly applied to all sectors of the population. Specifically, we seek to understand why gathering for worship in limited numbers with safety precautions is not allowed, while bars, restaurants and gyms remain open. It also seems necessary to remind the Government that religious freedom is a specifically protected right guaranteed by Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Last week, I formally requested that the Provincial Government reconsider the Order that currently limits our ability to celebrate Mass publicly in our churches. This request follows several enquiries, dating back to December 2020, from the St. Thomas More Catholic Lawyers Guild. They asked for information regarding the rationale for restricting religious worship, while other gatherings in BC are allowed to continue as long as they enforce the necessary safety measures. I am deeply grateful to the lawyers of the Guild for their wise counsel and their assistance in preparing the request submitted to the Government.

My request for reconsideration outlines several additional measures that the Archdiocese will implement in our parishes. Some of these go beyond measures that were in place last year. They include limiting attendance at Masses and other gatherings, at least initially, to 10% of the capacity of the church, requiring attendees to wear masks at all times, restricting indoor or outdoor social gatherings before or after Mass, and having ushers present at all Masses to ensure adherence to strict safety guidelines.

I believe that this request to the Provincial Government, and the proposed measures, are just and worthy of reconsideration. You will receive updates on developments as they unfold.

With gratitude for your support of our brothers and sisters in need of your solidarity at this trying time, and with my prayers for your families during this holy season, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Michael Miller CSB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross symbol at the beginning.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver