



September 24, 2021.

Dear Priests and Deacons,

I am writing to you today on the Feast Day of Blessed Émilie Tavernier-Gamelin, the foundress of the Sisters of Providence. Her dying words strike me as particularly *à propos*: “humility, simplicity, charity, but above all charity.” One of the unfortunate consequences of the pandemic has been the division it has sown in our parish communities. Fear has often been the cause of such division and polarization. How can we in charity do our best to celebrate our faith together, protecting one another’s health and listening to the legitimate reasons for special accommodations? May we all be agents of peace and unity, finding ways to accompany people on both sides of this issue. May Blessed Émilie intercede for us as we continue to navigate the complexities of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Will we require proof of double vaccination to attend Mass? No. There is no indication that the provincial government will require proof of vaccination to attend Mass. It is not a guarantee that this will remain the case, but Ontario looks to be going a different route than other provinces. We are not looking at requiring proof of double vaccination to attend Mass as something we would voluntarily implement in our parishes.

Local health authorities are advocating that all employers have a vaccination policy in place for their employees. The situation is fluid, as the provincial and local governments attempt to deal with the increases in cases requiring hospitalization. Fall flu season is approaching and it is unclear what effect that will have on the medical system. We will continue to provide guidance after consultation with experts to ensure the best decisions are made with the information available.

It is only a matter of time before we, as an employer, will be required to have a vaccination policy in place for all employees. While we do not wish to rush ahead and put something in place before it is required, we must plan ahead so that we are prepared for when the situation changes.

I am again encouraging all priests and deacons to get doubly vaccinated to lessen the chance that you will become ill with the Covid virus, or if you do get infected, to mitigate the worse health outcomes requiring hospitalization or intensive care.

There is another reason based on charity to get vaccinated: given that schools, long term care facilities and nursing homes, as well as hospitals, will require proof of double vaccination for you to enter and provide ministry, I urge you to get vaccinated so that you can continue your ministry of pastoral care, especially the anointing of the sick, ministry of presence and evangelization. Without proof of double vaccinations, clergy will not be allowed into these places and our ability to care for the people will be significantly reduced.

Planning for Eventualities:

It may come to the point where government regulations require everyone who works with the public, including clergy, to be doubly vaccinated. I sincerely hope and pray that it does not come to that point.

For the sake of being able to continue your ministry with as few restrictions as possible, I ask you to please get vaccinated.

What about Rapid Testing as a Solution? We are exploring what options might be available for those who are unvaccinated yet need to be at work, such as twice a week rapid testing, as a possible solution. There are questions we are looking into such as sourcing rapid tests, who administers them and how they are tracked in a secure way?

These next points address our need in parishes to prepare for foreseeable scenarios. Please consider how your parish will address these scenarios.

Office Staff: What can you do if Office Staff cannot come on site to work? Can they work remotely?

Parish Plan for Clergy (Mass): what if the pastor cannot celebrate Mass without proof of vaccination? We are not at that point. We are looking into rapid testing as an option if this becomes necessary.

Parish Plan for Clergy (Anointing, Funeral, Baptisms, Reconciliation, Pastoral Care): How will you address calls to anoint the sick, reconciliation, baptisms or pastoral care for parishioners in the event that you are not able to meet these needs yourself? Now is the time to begin planning for this contingency.

I pray that this contingency planning will not be necessary but is it preferable to be prepared and not need to implement a plan than to discover regulations changed on Friday afternoon and there was no plan ready to implement for the first of the Sunday (vigil) Masses on Saturday evening.

Thank you for all the creative ways you have been responding to this difficult challenge. I know this has made extraordinary demands on you, your collaborators in ministry and the parishioners. Our ability to face these challenges, united in faith, hope and charity, is our strength.

May God bless you and may the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, her spouse, intercede for us.

✠ Marcel Damphousse

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