

Catholic churches in Ottawa area closed as COVID-19 cases keep rising

All Catholic churches in the Ottawa and Alexandria-Cornwall dioceses are being closed after the chief medical officer for the Eastern Ontario Health Unit ordered all places of worship in the region to shut down.

"I ask that effective immediately all churches in the Alexandria-Cornwall and Ottawa dioceses be closed – even for private prayer – until further notice," Ottawa Archbishop Terrence Prendergast announced on March 23, after Dr. Paul Roumeliotis issued the order in light of increasing community spread in the Greater Ottawa area of the deadly COVID-19 virus.

"I acknowledge that these closures are difficult, and I have not taken this decision lightly," Roumeliotis said. "However, we must take all measures necessary as a society to prevent the spread of COVID-19."

The decision to close all Catholic churches in the Greater Ottawa area of Ontario also comes after Dr. Vera Etches, the medical officer of health in Ottawa, said there could be thousands of undetected cases of the deadly COVID-19 virus in the nation's capital city.

"Ottawa Public Health now has laboratory confirmation of community spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) in Ottawa," Etches said on March 22.

"Additionally, we are starting to see cases among health-care workers who have not traveled or been a close contact of a confirmed case. Based on modelling data, there could now be up to 4,000 undetected cases of COVID-19 in our community," she said.

Before Archbishop Prendergast ordered the closure of all Catholic churches in the Ottawa and Alexandria-Cornwall dioceses on March 23, he had published a message to the dioceses' parishioners calling on them to increase the frequency of their prayers in this time of crisis.

"May I encourage us all together to make an extra effort to implore God's providential intervention in this time of trial? What I am asking is for us all to increase our prayers – to lift our voices in the supplication to God our Father for those afflicted at home and abroad, for medical health practitioners, for our leaders, and for all who are anxious or who face many difficulties as a result of the impact this virus has on our community," Archbishop Prendergast said on March 19.