

Thousands tune in to Cardinal's virtual fundraising dinner

The COVID-19 pandemic is an opportunity for Toronto Catholics to “go deeper” into their spiritual lives, Cardinal Thomas Collins told thousands who gathered before television and computer screens for the most unusual Cardinal's Dinner in over four decades.

“It's a time of distress,” Toronto's archbishop told CTV television journalist Alicia Markson in an interview broadcast over Salt + Light TV and livestreamed via YouTube and Facebook. “At the same time, it's a time to go deeper ... to live life more fully and also to reach out.”

Over 1,000 computer screens were tuned in to the event, in addition to a substantial television audience watching on Salt + Light, with many of those screens being watched by families gathered together. Archdiocese of Toronto director of communications Neil MacCarthy is confident the total audience easily outstrips live audiences of 1,700 diners gathered at the Metro Convention Centre in recent years.

By the close of the broadcast, the charity dinner had raised over \$170,000 “and counting” for a diverse group of small Catholic charities, from Poverello Charities serving former psychiatric patients to Ripples of Kindness which feeds the poor on the streets of downtown Toronto.

Collins, a former Archbishop of Edmonton, was quick to remind viewers that COVID-19 restrictions are about much more than the inconvenience and change to our routines we experience.

“We think of all the people who are suffering so much, and so many who have died,” he said. “And we do all that we can to protect them.”

He also praised the thousands of parish volunteers in the Archdiocese of Toronto's 225 parishes who have helped re-open the churches safely by greeting their fellow parishioners at the door with hand sanitizer, washing down pews after Mass, ensuring masks are worn and seating families and individuals two metres apart.

By proving to health authorities and provincial officials that churches can safely operate, Toronto Catholics have assured themselves there's a place and time in their lives set apart from worry and anxiety, said the archbishop.

“To recognize what a place of refuge this is; what a place of strength,” he said.

Collins looked forward to a time when COVID-19 does not dominate our minds and our routines.

“We have to reach a point where we’re no longer in this heightened sense of this situation of caution,” he said. “There comes a limit. We need to get beyond it.”

With a large audience tuned in, the cardinal took the opportunity to reiterate his dismay over legalized euthanasia in Canada.

“People are being killed, basically,” he said. “People are suffering and they are being put to death through euthanasia.”

He again dismissed the official terminology of “Medical Assistance in Dying” as essentially mendacious.

“It’s so very tragic,” he said. “We have ways of helping people who are suffering... To put a person to death through euthanasia is just misguided and so very, very tragic.”

The evening also featured music and short documentary videos explaining the work of representative charities. Politicians who might otherwise have been on the dais at a live event sent video greetings.

“I want to thank everyone for your prayers during the pandemic,” Ontario Premier Doug Ford said.

Federal Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Marco Mendocino praised the Archdiocese of Toronto and churches across the country for their work in resettling refugees. The churches have helped to make Canada the country that permanently resettles more refugees than any other.

“We could not have achieved this milestone without the partnership of the archdiocese,” Mendocino said.

Collins urged Toronto Catholics to continue to use the COVID crisis to grow in holiness.

“We move outward to charity and to love and to acts of service in the Lord,” he said. “It’s also an opportunity to become more and more aware of the way in which we can love God and love neighbour.”