May 21, 2020

Dear Faith Community Leaders,

**Subject: Peel Public Health Update re COVID-19**

As you know, COVID-19 is a serious public health issue and all levels of government have implemented significant public health measures to help reduce the spread of this disease. On March 17, 2020, the Premier of Ontario declared a state of emergency in Ontario in recognition of the seriousness of the situation. On March 20, 2020 I issued a letter strongly encouraging you to suspend all services and gatherings.

More recently on May 19, 2020, the Province of Ontario announced an extension of emergency orders until May 29, 2020 and officially entered the first stage of its Framework for Reopening the Province. As part of this announcement, an amendment to the emergency order was made allowing individuals to attend drive-in religious gatherings, so long as they comply with the safeguards listed in the amendment to the emergency order.

It was my strong recommendation to Peel’s local municipal mayors that these amenities do not re-open in Peel, as it is not yet safe. Similarly, it is my **strong recommendation that at this time, drive-in religious gatherings do not occur in Peel.**

Although new reported cases have plateaued in recent weeks, we have not seen a sustained decrease in new cases, which is one of the key public health indicators identified in the Province’s plan for reopening. Of great concern is this past long weekend, we saw a notable increase in reported cases. We also continue to have a significant number of COVID-19 cases on wards and in intensive care units in both Mississauga and Brampton. Furthermore, the congregation of large groups of people, even in cars, will present challenges to maintaining physical distance. In addition, there could be unintended negative health consequences related to heat and air quality, particularly among vulnerable populations like seniors and young children.

I recognize that this is disappointing for those hoping to return to some form of normalcy by gathering with their faith communities, and I recognize the ongoing sacrifices made by Peel residents and places of worship during this challenging time. Peel Public Health continues to encourage members of our faith communities to remain connected and practice their faith virtually.
I am confident, however, that such actions are necessary to protect the health of our community. Taking the time to consider when we reopen these facilities in a manner that respects our local epidemiology and context will ensure that we continue to stop the spread of COVID-19. I also want to thank our faith communities for their contributions in slowing the spread of COVID-19 in our community and keeping each other safe by making these inconvenient, but important adaptations to their long-held traditions.

As always, I thank you for your continued support.

Your truly,

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