
3331, rue Sherbrooke Est Montréal QC H1W 1C5

MEDIA STATEMENT
for immediate release

**Reconfinement for places of worship by limiting attendance at 25 or 50 people:
Religious Leaders in Quebec Denounce an Injustice**

Montreal, 21 September 2020 — Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis in Quebec, leaders of religious groups have collaborated closely with public health authorities. In many respects, health measures put in place within places of worship exceed the government's guidelines. The result is that to this day, to our knowledge, no outbreak has been triggered in a place of worship. In these difficult times, religious leaders are doing all that is necessary to enforce measures that ensure the protection of the health of their communities.

In these troubled times, thousands of Quebecers find consolation and a source of resilience in the practice of their religion, which benefits the entire population. Whatever our perspective, spirituality and the search for meaning play an essential role in human life. This service to the community appears to us necessary for helping our communities to get through this health crisis.

Religious leaders spared no effort in engaging in a frank and open dialogue with government authorities, in a spirit of collaboration. Unfortunately, we lost track of the number of letters that have received no acknowledgment of receipt, and phone calls and emails left unanswered. While government authorities in neighbouring provinces have maintained a direct and constant contact with religious leaders, no communication of this type exists in Quebec. This situation is disappointing and unacceptable.

On Sunday afternoon, the minister of health announced a series of stricter measures in order to protect the population from COVID-19. However, the lack of dialogue that we are denouncing has resulted in the government once again putting places of worship in the same category as bars. In its news release, the health minister speaks in the same breath of "*activities within places of worship and in rooms where the sale or service of alcoholic beverages for on-site consumption.*" This connection is clearly unjustified and false.

Source : Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec (AECQ) (Assemble of Quebec Catholic Bishops)

Information : Mgr Pierre Murray, C.S.S.

Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec

Téléphone : 514-274-4323, poste 231 | 514-914-0553

pmurray@evequescatholiques.quebec ; www.evequescatholiques.quebec

Gatherings in places of worship are, in truth, similar to those that take place inside movie theaters and concert halls, according to the very criteria put forward by the government: "*Places where people are seated, relatively immobile, and speak very little or not at all, for instance concert halls, cinemas, theaters and studios of audiovisual production, can continue to welcome a maximum of 250 people.*"¹ The government seemed to have already recognized this similarity in the 26 August 2020 ministerial decree (2020-059) from the minister of health and social services, which allows people who are seated to remove their mask or face-covering when they are immobile, and to sit at a distance of 1.5 metres from one another, as in concert halls and movie theaters. Moreover, protocols for the safe reopening of places of worship, established in collaboration with public health authorities, make it so that communities gathering in places of worship limit speaking within assemblies as much as possible.

As a result, we insist that government authorities reclassify places of worship in the category of concert halls, cinemas and theaters, which would allow us to continue welcoming a maximum of 250 people in our places of worship, instead of being limited to 25 or 50 people. We also ask that a frank and open channel of communication be established between ourselves and government authorities. We are not demanding a privilege. We are offering ourselves as partners, and we simply wish to receive a fair hearing from the government.

We, religious leaders who are members of the Quebec Interreligious Roundtable, seek an open dialogue with government authorities. We sincerely hope that this will be sufficient to assert our rights and to receive from the government the recognition that is due to its citizens who practice their religion by respecting health guidelines.

In the name of the members of the Quebec Interreligious Roundtable²,



+ Christian Rodembourg
Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe
President of the Quebec Assembly of Catholic Bishops

¹ Communiqué du 20 septembre 2020 : <https://www.msss.gouv.qc.ca/ministere/salle-de-presse/communiqué-2322/>. Consulté le 20 septembre 2020.

² The Quebec Interreligious Roundtable brings together representatives from the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, evangelical Churches, different Jewish traditions, different mosques, and the Canadian Centre for Ecumenism.

For interviews:

- Bishop Christian Rodembourg, bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe and president of AECQ. Contact : Mgr Pierre Murray, C.S.S., secrétaire général de l'AECQ, 514-914-0553 | pmurray@evequescatholiques.quebec
- **Gérald Cyprien CARDINAL Lacroix, archbishop of Quebec and vice-president of AECQ: will give a press conference at 3:30pm today.** Contact : Valérie Roberge-Dion, Église catholique de Québec. 418-802-1214 | vrd@ecdq.org
- Bishop Christian Lépine, archbishop of Montreal and member of the AECQ Executive committee. Contact : Erica Jacinto attachée de presse de l'archevêque 514 709 8216 | ejacinto@diocesemontreal.org
- Iman Hassan Guillet, representing the Muslim community in Quebec, 514-699-7257 | hassan_guillet@hotmail.com
- Rabbi Reuben Poupko, representative of the Council of Montreal Rabbis, 514-898-4004 | reubenpoupko@gmail.com
- Dr Adriana Bara, PhD, directrice du Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, 438-822-3141 | abara@oikoumene.ca
- Dr Denitsa Tsvetkova, PhD, Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, Coordinator of the Interreligious Forum for Peace, 514-937-9176 | denitsa@oikoumene.ca
- The Right Rev. Bruce Myers, Anglican bishop of Quebec, 418 570 4384 | bmyers@quebec.anglican.ca
- Dr. Louis Bourque, Director of the Association d'Église Baptistes Évangéliques au Québec, Member of the Executive of the Réseau Évangelique du Québec, 514-961-5052 | l.bourque@aebeq.qc.ca
- Mohamed Labidi, president of the Islamic Cultural Center of Quebec City, tel 418-998-3655 | labidi7@hotmail.com
- Mr Alain Picard, communication advisor, Council of Hassidic Jews of Quebec (CJHQ), 514-953-2632 | alain.picard3976@gmail.com