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MEDIA STATEMENT
for immediate release

Reconfinement for places of worship by limiting attendance at 25 or 50 people:
Making the Difference Between Activities in Places of Worship
And Other Activities

Montreal, 23 September 2020 — While data shows a resurgence in Covid-19 cases in Quebec, religious leaders in Quebec reiterate their commitment to participate in the collective efforts aimed at containing the disease.

As they have been doing since 22 June, faith communities will continue to strictly enforce the protocols submitted to—and approved by—the Quebec government. No place of worship has been the site of an outbreak of the novel coronavirus. Because of the adherence to the protocols, at all time people present in places of worship keep the prescribed physical distance, sanitize their hands at the entrance and exit, and wear their mask when they are circulating.

Religious leaders also wish to clarify that the vast majority of weekly religious gatherings on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are not associated with social events before or after the religious service: people simply return home afterward.

Only exceptional events can become occasions for social gatherings after a religious service: rites of initiation, weddings, funerals, etc. Conscious of the risks associated with such social gatherings surrounding these religious rites, authorities responsible for places of worship are ready to contribute to the efforts required for engaging with the individuals involved in these exceptional events, so that they refrain from holding them or postpone them.

In order to limit these exceptional situations, there are means of intervention other than limiting the whole of regular activities in places of worship.

For this reason, the rules imposed to places of worship last Sunday, without any prior dialogue, are disproportionate and infringe upon the freedom to worship. In these difficult times, hundreds

Source : Assemblée des évêques catholiques du Québec (AECQ)

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of thousands of Quebecers find a source of meaning, comfort and resilience in their regular religious practices. Let us remember that this is one of their fundamental rights.

We once again invite the government to better target its interventions and to thereby contribute to respecting the freedom to worship. Authorities responsible for places of worship offer the government their full collaboration to rapidly find solutions that will benefit the whole of the population, and that will contribute to create a safe and sanitary environment for all.

Gatherings in places of worship have nothing to do with “rooms where the service of alcoholic beverages is allowed” or those “where any event or any reception of a festive nature takes place,” contrary to what is asserted in the 20 September statement by the ministry of health. What takes place in a place of worship is more akin to what takes place in a theater or a cinema.

That is why, in the absence of a specific category for places of worship, the members of the Quebec Interreligious Roundtable reiterate the demands they have expressed since Monday: *“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”*, while applying the protocols negotiated on 4 August 2020. They also request that *“a frank and open channel of communication be established quickly between them and government authorities.”*

In the name of the members of the Quebec Interreligious Roundtable¹,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Christian Rodembourg".

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

¹ **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:

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