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## LETTER OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF QUÉBEC TO THEIR SISTERS AND BROTHERS ON THE OCCASION OF THE REOPENING OF PLACES OF WORSHIP ON FEBRUARY 7 2022

With all people of faith, we, the Catholic bishops of Quebec, look forward to the reopening of our places of worship on February 7, 2022. This shows that our public authorities recognize the importance of religious gatherings and activities for a significant number of citizens. It will now be possible for communities to gradually resume their activities and so provide support and comfort to many people.

The resumption of our activities is an opportunity to recall the duty of the State to respect, promote and protect religious freedom. The Declaration on Religious Freedom made during the Second Vatican Council is very clear on this subject. We make this conviction our own:

The protection and promotion of the inviolable rights of man ranks among the essential duties of government. Therefore government is to assume the safeguard of the religious freedom of all its citizens, in an effective manner, by just laws and by other appropriate means. Government is also to help create conditions favourable to the fostering of religious life, in order that the people may be truly enabled to exercise their religious rights and to fulfill their religious duties, and also in order that society itself may profit by the moral qualities of justice and peace which have their origin in men's faithfulness to God and to His holy will.<sup>1</sup>

Our churches' reopening is the result of many efforts by the members of the *Table interreligieuse de concertation du Québec*, with whom we stand in solidarity. We have coordinated efforts with them to persistently ask the government to reopen worship places as soon as possible. We also insisted that people attending our assemblies be exempted from the requirement of the vaccination passport, aware as we are of the negative effects of its imposition on our communities. We recognize that many faithful believe that this requirement constitutes an intolerable discrimination that deprives unvaccinated people of

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<sup>1</sup> *Declaration on Religious Freedom—Dignitatis Humanae* of December 7, 1965  
[www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decl\\_19651207\\_dignitatis-humanae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html), number 6, consulted on February 3, 2022.

their right to religious freedom. This exclusion seems to them to be incompatible with the very essence of a community of believers, called to be welcoming, compassionate and open to diversity. On this, we agree with them.

However, in this exceptional pandemic moment, Catholics have a duty to join their efforts to those of all members of society to ensure the safety and health of all, even if some measures affect the exercise of certain freedoms for a while. The *Declaration on Religious Freedom* speaks to us on this subject. We can read at number 2 of this text:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to their own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.<sup>2</sup>

We note that the declaration recognizes that “due limits” can be imposed on religious freedom in certain circumstances. Moreover, the Council Fathers also consider necessary to emphasize in number 7 of the same declaration that this freedom is not absolute: it comes with a responsibility for the common good.

In the use of all freedoms, the moral principle of personal and social responsibility is to be observed. In the exercise of their rights, individuals and social groups are bound by the moral law to have respect both for the rights of others and for their own duties toward others and for the common welfare of all. Each should deal in justice and civility with all.

Thus, for members of the Catholic community, the expression of religious freedom is not only centred on individual rights and needs, but also concerned for the health of others. This freedom may exceptionally be subject to temporary restrictions for the common good.

The same is true for freedom of conscience. Indeed, our conscience does not operate in a vacuum: it is formed in dialogue with different sources of moral wisdom and its decisions must be directed toward others, in solidarity with others. As Pope Francis recalled in his address to members of the Catholic media on January 28, 2022, “we do not emerge from a crisis alone.”<sup>3</sup>

For this, we need to work together, together for others, especially those who are needy, and together in the service of truth, which means seeking that which promotes communion and the good of all.

As humanity faces the risks to our societies brought on by this pandemic, Catholics recognize that governments not only have the right but, even more, the duty to intervene to ensure the health and safety of all. This is the state’s duty, even if the decisions taken are imperfect and questionable, made at the cost of scientific and political compromise.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* number 2.

<sup>3</sup> Pope François, *Speech*, January 28, 2022.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/january/documents/20220128-mediaticattolici.html>, consulted on February 2, 2022.

While exercising healthy vigilance and our democratic duty to discuss and to question certain decisions, we are challenged by the apostle Paul who reminds us never to stop supporting our rulers with our prayers:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

Therefore, it seems reasonable to us in the present circumstances to accept certain compromises that contribute to the safety and health of all. For the moment, we accept that vaccination passports are required to access worship spaces, even if this measure upsets us deeply. However, we remain in contact with government authorities to remind them that this requirement goes against our beliefs and to ensure that it will be lifted as soon as it is safe to do so.

That being said, we would like to affirm the concern of all our Church's pastors as we strive to accompany and offer support to all those who at this time do not have access to our churches. Whether through individual meetings, by broadcasting celebrations, by celebrating liturgies outdoors or through any other safe means, we want all baptized people to be welcomed and accompanied. In these times, exceptionally difficult for all of us, we unite our prayer to that of Pope Francis: "I ask God that each of us might contribute their little grain of sand, their little gesture of love."<sup>4</sup> In no way do the constraints we encounter prevent us from loving our neighbours, from helping them and from offering them our friendship.

May the peace and grace of our Lord be with you!

The members of our Assembly's executive committee,

+ Christian Rodembourg, M.S.A.  
Évêque de Saint-Hyacinthe  
Président de l'Assemblée

+ Paul-André Durocher  
Archevêque de Gatineau  
Vice-président de l'Assemblée

+ Gérald C. Card. Lacroix  
Archevêque de Québec

+ Christian Lépine  
Archevêque de Montréal

+ Luc Cyr  
Archevêque de Sherbrooke

*February 3rd, 2022*

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<sup>4</sup> <https://youtu.be/JWf3Ji1EaU>, consulted February 2, 2022.