

Quebec bishops cancel funerals and weddings

The bishops of Quebec have taken the unprecedented step of suspending all celebrations and events in churches across the province.

A March 15 statement signed by Bishop Christian Rodembourg said the extreme measure came after a directive from the provincial government to close all public gathering places in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

“Given the extent of the danger, the urgency of the situation and the solidarity required under such circumstances, the executive of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec is recommending, effective today, the suspension of all celebrations and public activities in the churches of Quebec,” the statement said.

Other dioceses across Canada have cancelled Sunday Masses and curtailed other parish activities, but none have gone as far as the bishops of Quebec in virtually shutting down parish life.

Priests across the province have been instructed to contact families which have planned a baptism, funeral or wedding in order to reschedule the event.

On March 13, the bishops had cancelled all Sunday Masses in the province, but allowed churches to remain open for weekday masses and events such as weddings and funerals, provided there were fewer than 250 people in the church. This latest measure extends to weekday Masses and every other parish activity.

Priests, however, are instructed “to remain attentive to the needs of those who are alone or sick, and to offer them spiritual solace.” This can include taking the Eucharist to homes and providing the Sacrament of the Sick.

Priests are also asked to “remain available” and to “show pastoral creativity” in accommodating parishioners who seek a private meeting or home visit.

Church doors can remain open “but for private prayer and personal devotion only,” the statement said.