

Quebec bishops cancel weekend Masses over coronavirus

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the bishops of Quebec have cancelled weekend Masses across the province until further notice.

The step was taken in response to measures to combat the spread of the virus announced by the Quebec government, which include limiting public assemblies to fewer than 250 people.

The bishops said they “want to contribute to this joint public health effort and act in solidarity with the authorities.”

“Given the impossibility, in many places, of managing the limit of 250 people gathered, also considering that many of our parishioners are over the age of 65 and are therefore more at risk of contracting the virus, as a preventive measure,” all weekend Masses were cancelled, said a statement from the Assembly of Quebec’s Catholic bishops.

Quebec has confirmed 17 cases of COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus. Over 130 cases are currently under investigation. The Quebec government is banning all indoor events with more than 250 people. Many Quebec schools are closing March 13 while adhering to provincial recommendations such as cancelling large events and staggering lunch hours.

Churches will remain open for small gatherings and for personal visits, but parishioners are being encouraged to view Mass on TV, pray at home and read Scripture.

The bishops said they “remain in contact with civil authorities and follow closely the evolution of the situation. Other directives may be communicated in due course.”

“We pray for those affected by this virus, for those who are concerned and for the staff caregiver who devotes himself with great generosity.”

In Ontario, the provincial government announced that all publicly-funded schools, which includes all Catholic schools, will be closed for two weeks after March break. That means schools will be closed from March 14 to April 5.

The decision was made based on advice from Ontario’s chief medical officer of health, said a government statement.

“We recognize the significant impact this decision will have on families, students, schools, as well as the broader community, but this precaution is necessary to keep people safe.”