

Office of the Bishop

March 3, 2021

Because of the progress being made against the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas. Governor Greg Abbott has [announced](#) that he is increasing the capacity of all businesses and facilities in the state to 100 percent and lifting his mask requirement for the state.

Governor Abbott said that COVID-19 has not disappeared and that “removing state mandates does not end personal responsibility.” The governor stressed that removing these mandates doesn’t abandon safe practices. The same applies to our churches. We are still in a pandemic that has tragically caused over 500,000 deaths in the United States and there is still a virus that can easily spread if we are not careful.

I ask and expect all clergy and faithful to continue to take measures to keep everyone safe. This is essential in order to protect the health of our communities and so that we do not lose the progress that, by God's grace, has been made against COVID-19.

In light of the actions taken by the governor, I issue the following updates and instructions:

Dispensation. The general dispensation from the obligation to attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Day of Obligation that I issued in March of 2020 is withdrawn as of March 10, 2021. Many have already returned to Mass, and I encourage everyone to do so now, aware of the centrality of the Mass to our lives as Catholics and the obligation attached to it.

One does not have an obligation to attend Mass if you are sick or in a high-risk category for COVID-19; if you were recently in contact with a sick person: if you care for the sick or homebound; if you are pregnant; or if you have a *significant* fear or anxiety of becoming ill by being at Mass.

Seating at Mass. Pastors may open additional pews in churches, but all must be responsible for observing social distancing (6-feet between households) according to [CDC guidelines](#). Depending on the church, seating every other pew may still be the best way to maintain social distancing, per the [Texas Minimum Standard Health Protocols](#) for churches. Pastors should consider making special areas available for vulnerable persons.

Masks. While there is no requirement to wear masks, and it is an individual choice, I encourage all to continue to

follow the [recommendations of the CDC](#).

Holy Communion. Churches in the diocese will continue to distribute Holy Communion only under the form of bread. Ministers of Communion must continue to observe the practices that are currently in place.

Holy Water and Hymnals. Parishes may make holy water, hymnals, and missalettes available. Holy water should be changed, and fonts/stoups cleaned frequently.

Events. Parish social events, classes, and other activities are permitted if CDC guidelines can be followed.

Other. Parishes should continue to observe heightened sanitization and hygiene standards for common surfaces. Hand sanitizer should continue to be made available.

Let us continue to be mindful of the sanctity of the life of each person we encounter and, in love, do our part to keep our families, friends, and communities safe and healthy.

+ Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler