



Bishop Edward J. Burns issues response to Governor Abbott's decision

All of us have been impacted by COVID-19. It has tested our faith and caused tremendous hardships and loss. Though these have been difficult times, we must remain hopeful and vigilant.

The governor's recent decision to remove the mask mandate and open up the state has created concern as to how our churches and schools will respond to the announcement. **After consultation with priest representatives, health experts and a review of the most current COVID statistics, at this time I have asked our pastors to continue to adhere to the current protocols we have in place.** This includes the dispensation of the Sunday Mass obligation, social distancing and modest church capacity limits. We also expect the Catholic faithful in the Diocese of Dallas to continue to wear masks out of charity and concern for all those around them. I plan to regularly revisit this question as this issue develops, always with an eye on medical statistics, hope for the future and the needs of the faithful in view.

In his announcement on March 2, Governor Abbott said that while the state mandates are no longer in place he urged Texans to continue to exercise "personal vigilance" in navigating the pandemic and that entities can "limit capacity or implement additional safety protocols." He even encouraged Texans to continue to wear their masks.

Our Catholic Schools Office has led the way in researching, consulting and implementing COVID protocols to keep our students, teachers and families in school and safe. Superintendent Dr. Matt Vereecke has already announced that the existing safety measures will remain in place at all diocesan schools through the end of this school year.

I am aware of many people suffering from COVID fatigue. But hope shines brighter than ever with vaccines becoming more available in our communities. **Regarding vaccines, I also felt it was important to make a comment on the newly available Johnson & Johnson vaccine. Please see the diocesan website for this information.**

As I have said before, I am very grateful to serve as your Bishop. As your shepherd, I will always do whatever I can to protect my flock. Please join me in praying for an end to this horrific pandemic that has claimed countless lives. May our Heavenly Father grant us patience and understanding as we all work together to help bring an end to the spread of this deadly virus and the tremendous suffering it has caused.