



12525 Inwood Road  
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5 March 2021

Dear St. Rita Community,

In light of Governor Abbott's recent executive order, I feel it necessary to restate the Parish's position regarding protocols and other matters related to the pandemic. That is, put simply, considering Governor Abbott's actions, is anything changing at St. Rita?

First, though, I want to thank all of you for the many changes, some sacrificial, you've embraced for the sake of others and our community at large. Many parishioners and visitors have had to do things differently because of the pandemic; some have had to worship quite differently, uncomfortably even, because we've asked them to make sacrifices for the sake of precaution and safety. I want to thank especially those who normally receive Holy Communion on the tongue. If you've been to Mass at St. Rita, you know we ask those receiving Communion on the tongue to receive in that manner in the Eucharistic Chapel immediately after Mass. To us, this seems the safest practice. But for those who do this—who wait to receive Communion in the Eucharistic Chapel—it is a profound act of love. Receiving Communion on the tongue, an ancient and beautiful practice, is deeply meaningful to many. And we all should be thankful to those who, of their charity, have accepted this burden. It is a burden, I promise, I hope to lift as soon as safely possible.

But also to each of you: **Thank you for your cooperation this past year!** Your charity in action and your gentleness has allowed us all to worship the Lord safely, welcoming again parishioners old and new to St. Rita. It really has been beautiful to see the Parish work together under extraordinary circumstances. Please know that your contribution—your acceptance of all we've asked of you—has made a difference. People are coming back and for the first time because they feel safe and because they feel cared for. This is precious important; it's also important we remain a place of safety and caring. And so, I thank you for that. And let's keep it up!

So, what does Governor Abbott's recent executive order mean for St. Rita? In short and at present: Nothing. The protocols in place at St. Rita will remain in place until further notice. And these are:

- **We still require those attending Mass to wear their masks** the entire time they are in the church. We also ask you to wear your mask fully covering your nose and mouth. Also, we ask you not to wear masks with holes in them.
- **We will continue to keep attendance limited**, marking off every other pew. However, you do **not** have to register to attend Mass.
- **We still ask you to keep physical distance** at all times.
- **Please continue to abide by the instructions of all Ushers and Clergy.** Our Ushers will still coordinate the distribution of Communion and the Dismissal.
- **We also continue to ask that you receive Communion in the hand.**



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Now, in time I expect these protocols will change. In fact, I am hopeful that as more people are vaccinated, and as we maintain safe practices such as wearing masks, things will open further. We have, though, made one small change just recently: the church is no longer locked during the day, but rather open for prayer. The doors on both the east and west side of the narthex are now open all day. However, for any further guidance, we will take it from the Diocese and from the professional experts who've helped us all along the way. That we are a Catholic parish, we will be guided first by the Bishop of Dallas. And in his statement, released today, he has asked us "to continue to adhere to the current protocols we have in place." Thus, our protocols will continue to reflect "Phase Three" of the Bishop's decree from 17 June 2020, a decree, stating importantly, that "the discretion of the pastor is paramount." Now Bishop Burns will, at the appropriate time, give even further guidance; and, I assure you, it will be considered, offered in the best interest of our spiritual and physical safety.

Now, specifically, about wearing masks, let me say two things. **First, at St. Rita, in both the Parish and the School, we have been very successful maintaining a safe environment.** Going to Mass and attending School at St. Rita are very safe things to do. I am proud that we have been able to function as well as we have. **And let me be clear: from our experience, we are certain this is due to our strict mask requirement and other protocols.** Masks, we have found, make all the difference. **Thus, we will continue to make masks required at all St. Rita Catholic Community events until further notice.** Things are improving, but we feel it best to maintain our current practice at this time. **Second, we should note the words of Governor Abbott's own executive order:** *"Nothing in this executive order precludes businesses or other establishments from requiring employees or customers to follow additional hygiene measures, including the wearing of a face covering."* This means, clearly, that we are perfectly able to continue requiring masks at St. Rita. Also, more importantly, the Governor's order underlines an important principle of charity and civic cooperation. We can state the principle thus: **Out of charity, one should always comply with the reasonable requirements each institution makes of its visitors or patrons.** This isn't difficult. For instance, if a restaurant or a church requires masks, one should, out of charity, comply with that requirement. Or, however, if say a bookshop or grocery store doesn't require masks, or only encourages them, then certainly feel free to act prudently according to your best judgment. This is what the Governor's order envisions—charity and mutual respect, thoughtfulness for others before self. Which is what we hope to continue at St. Rita, the charity necessary to be both good Christians and good Texans.

So, let's stay the course! Worshipping God and serving each other with compassion and understanding, let's finish this race strong! Mask up a little longer! We can do this! I am truly grateful to all of you, for all you've sacrificed and offered the Lord and our wonderful community. I am very optimistic and hopeful for the future—for our Parish, our Diocese, our city, and our country!

Be assured of my prayers! In Christ, I love you all!



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Pax,  
Fr. Joshua