



DIOCESE OF BEAUMONT

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Message from Bishop David Toups to the faithful of the Diocese of Beaumont

5 March 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of our crucified and risen Lord Jesus! We find ourselves in the midst of the Lenten Season, a time of making small sacrifices for the good of others, and I am going to ask each of us to continue to put charity ahead of our own comfort and convenience. For the past year, our churches have been operating safely and the well-being of our parishioners has been the guiding principle of all of our decisions. Due to the hard work of our pastors and parishioners there have been no reported outbreaks occurring due to our church gatherings. For this, many have expressed their deep gratitude and comfort in coming to Mass.

On Tuesday March 2, 2021, Governor Abbott's executive order, which is effective March 10, 2021, rescinds the statewide mask mandate. At the same time, he said that entities still have the right to operate how they want and can "limit capacity or implement additional safety protocols." The executive order said there was nothing stopping businesses and non-governmental agencies from "requiring employees or customers to follow additional hygiene measures, including the wearing of face coverings." The lifting of the statewide mandate does not limit the importance of continued measures of protection from the coronavirus. Offering further clarification on Thursday, the Governor said, "Texans have learned the best practice, and that is to wear a mask; and we still strongly recommend that people do wear a mask."

The good news is that we are making great progress in the fight against COVID-19. We all need to celebrate the advances of the medical community and the sacrifices that have gotten us to this point. In order to protect our people, it is too early for the church in Southeast Texas to completely relax our protocols. In dialogue with our diocesan staff and clergy, health professionals, and the bishops of the State of Texas, the following has been decided (effective March 13, 2021):

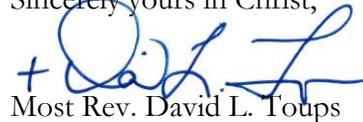
1. Use of Masks: There has been unanimous agreement among our diocesan task force to continue requiring the use of masks in our churches and schools for the time being. This is not a long-term decision, but until we get a little farther along in the fight against the virus, it is for the safety and well-being of all.
2. Social Distancing: Depending on the pastoral need of the parish and the architecture of the church, the pastor may make the decision to eliminate some of the current limitations in church seating. At least half of the church should remain reserved for social distancing for those who have compromised health or are simply more comfortable with being more socially distanced.

3. Regarding the reception of Holy Communion: We continue to strongly encourage the reception of our Eucharistic Lord in the hand, but for those who deeply desire to receive on the tongue, please come at the end of the Communion line (or in another way the pastor may indicate) so that the clergy/extraordinary minister of Holy Communion can then immediately purify their hands after distribution.
4. Cleaning: We are committed to continuing to sanitize our churches between services in order to ensure further safety and protection, and I am extremely grateful to all of those “teams” who so selflessly serve the rest of us by doing so.

The diocesan COVID-19 task force will continue to monitor the scientific health reports and metrics of the nine counties of Southeast Texas weekly. Depending on the number of active cases in a particular county, greater restrictions may be applied. Recognizing that the virus is real and has taken the lives of over a half a million people in our country, we will continue to stay attentive to the spread and virility of the disease or any new variants. The dispensation from the Sunday Mass obligation remains in place, in particular for those whose health is compromised and for their caregivers.

As bishop, shepherd, and spiritual father of this local Catholic community, I look forward to the day when the dispensation can be lifted and we can gather as a whole family of faith once again. I encourage those who have not yet returned to Mass to examine their reasoning for not attending, and make a well-informed moral decision for the good of your health and of your soul. We all need the Eucharist, and the community needs you. Let us pray that by the Easter Season we will have made even greater progress in our battle against the coronavirus and can celebrate with great joy and come together as parish families to celebrate the new life brought about through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David L. Toups", with a cross symbol to the left of the first name.

Most Rev. David L. Toups
Bishop of the Diocese of Beaumont