



WEARING MASKS DURING PUBLIC LITURGIES

To the Clergy, Religious, and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Tyler:

As we continue to face the public health crisis created by COVID-19, the situation in Texas has become extremely concerning. Yesterday, Governor Greg Abbott issued an Executive Order requiring all Texans to wear a face covering over the nose and mouth in public spaces in counties with 20 or more positive COVID-19 cases. I encourage all people of goodwill to fully cooperate with this order.

With regard to churches, I am grateful that the governor's order provides a legal exemption for religious worship, showing respect for the church-state relationship. At the same time, as faithful Catholic citizens we must do our part - not just for our own health but for the health of our families, friends, and communities. We are not exempt from our obligations to the common good, and we accept this inconvenience not out of fear, but out of charity and respect for the dignity of each person that flows from our life in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, **I ask the clergy and the assembly to wear masks during public liturgical celebrations in the Diocese of Tyler.** Small children and anyone with a disability that prevents wearing a mask are exempt. Clergy, readers, and cantors may temporarily remove masks while reciting the liturgical texts and scriptures, preaching, or leading song.

If we do this simple thing and embrace this small sacrifice, we can do our part to ensure that everyone stays healthy and that our churches can remain safe and open throughout this crisis.

I am thankful for the cooperation of God's holy faithful people in East Texas and I assure all of you of my closeness in prayer.

This instruction is effective July 3, 2020, and until further notice. The instruction of April 28, 2020, regarding celebrating liturgies while facing COVID-19 also remains in effect.

✠ Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler