

## **Excerpt from Message by Bishop Andy Doyle to Heads of Congregations and Schools**

On March 1, 2021 Rochelle Walensky, the CDC director, made the following statement:

"With these new statistics, I'm really worried about reports that more states are rolling back the exact public health measures we have recommended to protect people from COVID-19." "I understand the temptation to do this... But we cannot be resigned to 70,000 cases a day, 2,000 daily deaths."

"At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained. These variants are a very real threat to our people and our progress."

On March 2, 2021 Governor Greg Abbott declared restaurants were fully open and there was no need to wear a mask in public. (See Executive Order (GA-34)

We are concerned about business owners, especially small business owners. We care for those who depend upon restaurants to be open for their own livelihood as servers and kitchen staff. We know that economic realities are a part of the devastating effects of COVID -19 protocols. Over the last year we have seen an increase in demand in the many missionary services we provide to help families in financial need. We need to be attentive to these continuing needs and how we can serve our neighbors in a most difficult time.

We must not lose sight of the facts. On the day of July 2, 2020 there were 7434 new COVID-19 cases in Texas, and 44 deaths. On the day of March 1, 2021 there were 8140 new cases and 129 deaths. The Episcopal Diocese of Texas has made it very clear in our policies that we would support gathering safely. That has meant following those protocols given throughout the pandemic.

We remain morally charged with doing the greatest good, protecting the greatest number of lives, and are committed by our own Christian standards to do no harm.

We have managed to keep our institutions, schools, and congregations from being spreader sites throughout the crisis. Other churches have not been so fortunate. Therefore, we will continue to operate under the health and safety guidelines issued by me, and your opening plans approved by your regional bishops.

At least in the near term, I don't anticipate that our current practices regarding mask-wearing, physical distancing, and worship/event registration limits will change. When they do adjust, it will be the result of guidance provided by the CDC and the guidance offered by the Texas Medical Center. We continue to monitor COVID data daily and look to health officials for the best directive counsel.

In the meantime there is no reason why following the protocols we have laid out should keep you from gathering in a variety of ways in order to continue the mission of Christ through worship, fellowship, evangelism and service.

I am greatly heartened by current trends in our community, both with regard to decreasing viral levels and the increasing pace of vaccinations. Your observation of safety protocols, including masking, has contributed to these positive trends. Continued observation of these protocols is our way of protecting the health of our members, friends and neighbors.

Faithfully,  
C. Andrew Doyle  
IX Bishop of Texas  
Episcopal Diocese of Texas