



BISHOP OF THE
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE *of the* RIO GRANDE

THE RIGHT REVEREND MICHAEL BUERKEL HUNN

February 18, 2022

Dear Clergy and Lay Leadership,

Yesterday, in a move that's surprised many, if not all, New Mexicans, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham removed the mask mandate for all public spaces in the state of New Mexico, effective immediately.

This has already been the case in Texas for the last year, and we made clear then, as we will make clear now, that the decisions we make regarding the health of our congregations is guided by our deep love for one another and the best public health data available to us. Politics do not drive our decision making. The love of Jesus Christ does.

I am hopeful that the trends we are seeing (increasing vaccinations, decreasing cases, the omicron variant being less lethal) will continue, and lead us to a place where masks are optional in church.

We are reviewing the recommendations of health experts and will update our congregational protocols in the near future. For this Sunday, we will continue to wear masks in public worship throughout the Diocese of the Rio Grande.

Please remember:

In the Diocese of the Rio Grande our priorities remain what they have been throughout this pandemic: we are following Jesus' command to love God and to love our neighbor. This means I am willing to give up my preference in order to protect my neighbor.

The activities we engage in in church, such as the Holy Eucharist, singing, coffee hour, and fellowship events often require specific precautions based on our specific context.

We have also sought to make changes to our congregational worship slowly and thoughtfully so that our parishioners can know what to expect when they enter our churches. Our priority is that people are present for worship without worrying about getting sick. We need to give our congregants time before any changes occur so they can carefully think about and manage the risks beforehand.

I realize that some will be disappointed that we are not immediately lifting the mask mandates, but I hope no one will be surprised that yet again we are not allowing the politics of the moment to dictate our decisions. We are following healthcare professionals and doing everything we can to keep our congregants safe.

I thank you for your tireless efforts in loving one another and bearing one another's burdens. This Diocese is following the example of Jesus Christ that we love and sacrifice for one another.

Faithfully,

The Right Rev'd Michael B. Hunn
Bishop
Diocese of the Rio Grande