

April 11, 2021

The Most Reverend Edward Burns
Bishop of Dallas
Catholic Diocese of Dallas
3725 Blackburn Street
Dallas, TX 75219

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned members in good standing of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Dallas, present this letter to you in the spirit of charity and faithfulness. We write specifically in reference to the well-publicized incident that occurred at Holy Trinity Catholic Church on March 14th, 2021 and more generally in reference to the state of the Church in the Diocese. In all candor, the March 14th incident was shocking and saddening on many levels and the subsequent statement released by the Diocese in response was wholly insufficient for such an egregious lack of charity shown to Deirdre Hairston. In fact, it merely caused greater offense, deepening a growing and festering wound for a large portion of the Catholic faithful in Dallas. We, as faithful parishioners in the Diocese of Dallas, demand a public apology to Mrs. Hairston from the Diocese, Fr. Milton Ryan, and the usher at Holy Trinity Catholic Church, as well as a guarantee of fraternal correction for Pastor Ryan and his odious treatment of Mrs. Hairston. Until such a remedy is made, we, the undersigned, will withhold donations to the Diocese of Dallas.

Deirdre Hairston is a young mother whose commitment to the Faith is laudable for someone of her generation, especially when so many of her peers no longer feel welcomed in the embrace of the Church. She did not attend the 5pm Mass at Holy Trinity Catholic Church on March 14th to make a political statement, nor draw attention to herself. She was merely trying to fulfill her Sunday obligation despite the fact that the obligation is not yet reinstated, and she was attending an unfamiliar evening Mass due to the exhausting effects of early pregnancy and morning sickness. She was sure to distance herself from other parishioners when she removed her mask after feeling lightheaded. By CDC guidelines, she posed no medical threat to any member of the congregation.

Instead of being commended for her faithfulness and prudence, Mrs. Hairston was instead met with fury and condemnation from a shepherd and pastor in a place that should be safe and nurturing. Instead of pastoral charity and “golden” treatment, Mrs. Hairston was shamed, demeaned, and rejected, compromising her spiritual, emotional, and physical wellbeing in violation of the Diocesan Safe Environment Mission.

Despite the varied opinions of reasoned and researched parishioners on the effectiveness and appropriateness of masks, we ALL agree that the treatment of Mrs. Hairston was uncharitable, at best, and egregious and shameful at worst. The assurance from the Diocese that Mrs. Hairston was not arrested or ticketed and only given a trespass warning was offensive and embarrassing. Is it trespassing for young vulnerable mothers to seek out Christ in the liturgy? Is it the policy and practice of the Diocese to permanently bar even the most hardened sinner from church property, let alone a young pregnant mother committed to her Faith? On what grounds could any person in good conscience say that this mother was trespassing? It strains belief, but Mrs. Hairston was instructed never to return to Holy Trinity Catholic Church. Is there anything remotely charitable, logical or even canonical about this “punishment”?

The gravity of this incident on hearts and minds of DFW Catholic faithful cannot be ignored or “cleaned up” by the terse and dismissive public relations statement released by the Diocese. We can no longer, in good conscience or charity, remain silent. When there is a mass exodus occurring in Catholic Churches nationwide, particularly by young people, is this the message we want to send to young, faithful Catholic families?

The entire ordeal is utterly shameful. Enough is enough. There is no other acceptable remedy to this incident than a public apology to Mrs. Hairston from you, Bishop Burns, and from Fr. Milton Ryan and his usher, as well as an assurance of fraternal correction for his and Holy Trinity Catholic Church’s overzealous abuse of power in this incident. Again, until such public apology from all parties is received and fraternal correction ensured, we will redirect our faithful Diocesan donations instead to the many other wonderful, faithful, and courageous Catholic charities that are defending and delivering the Truths of the Catholic Faith.

Bishop Burns, you called on the faithful laity of the Diocese of Dallas to practice more patience and charity in these difficult times. Will you hold your clergy to the same standards?

Faithfully and Respectfully,
Romanus Catholicus Populus

Parishioner Name

Parishioner Signature

Parishioner Address