# Update on Texas Gun Laws affecting Churches and SchoolsNovember 1, 2019

The Bishops of West Texas issued a statement in December 2015 regarding new gun laws in Texas and the effect those laws had on our churches and schools in the Diocese. A copy of this statement is attached below. During the 2019 legislative session, the Texas legislature made additional changes, necessitating an updated statement from the Rt. Rev. David Reed, Bishop of West Texas.

Beginning January 1, 2016, Texans with a handgun license could openly carry their handguns. In 2019, the Texas legislature clarified that places of worship are not automatically exempt and must post signs, meeting prescribed standards, to prevent open or concealed carry. Churches in Texas may continue to prevent handgun license holders from carrying handguns inside their church buildings by giving proper notice, either orally or by posted sign.

As noted in the 2015 memo, our congregations with parochial schools are not required to post signs in order to restrict the open or concealed carrying of guns on church property. Under Federal Law, schools remain gun-free zones, with very limited exceptions. If your church includes a school on the same property as the church, individuals are still prohibited from carrying a gun on your property, whether open carry or concealed. Therefore, the posting of signage to restrict carrying a gun is not necessary to comply with the law. Churches with schools on their property certainly may post signage to ban the carrying of guns if they so choose.

The 2019 legislation also states that a school may not prohibit a licensed individual from storing a firearm or ammunition in a locked, privately owned or leased vehicle, provided that the firearm or ammunition is “not in plain view.” This amendment applies only to “a school district or open enrollment charter school” and does not apply to our parochial schools. However, media coverage has not made this distinction well known, and a reasonable person might conclude that the new law applies to our parochial schools. It is therefore recommended that the issue be addressed in the parent handbook and staff/administrative policies.

Any questions regarding this statement may be directed to -----, at ---.