



ROMAN CATHOLIC DIOCESE of PORTLAND

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Dear Members of Our Catholic School Community,

In March, Maine Catholic schools, along with all public schools across Maine, closed their doors due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Two days later, Maine Catholic schools successfully opened their virtual doors, providing a high-quality, distance learning program for all of our students across the state, efforts that were lauded by both school families and the wider community. Our Catholic schools continued to nurture the souls of our students while providing a comprehensive academic plan, building on their tradition of excellence.

The excellence was visible in both our attendance data and parent surveys. On average, 96% of our students participated daily in direct instruction offered virtually by their classroom teachers. Morning prayer, the pledge of allegiance, and birthday celebrations were carried out by a majority of our schools each day. Through the dedication of our priests, weekly school Masses were celebrated via livestream. Rigorous academic instruction continued, parent surveys recognized the contributions of our teachers, and parents were highly satisfied with remote learning and the overall preparedness of our school communities for this crisis.

We have now arrived at the end of an academic year that has been anything but typical. We recognize that the past two-and-a-half months have been a difficult time for our families. Parents trying to juggle their workload while having their children home has been demanding and a strain on families. Parents and children have had to adjust to a “new normal” as we all made sacrifices for the greater common good.

Despite the outstanding efforts of our schools to carry out distance learning, we recognize that nothing can fully replace the value of relationships established in the classroom between students and teachers, and students and their classmates. We believe and recognize that learning and formation are at their best when occurring in a classroom. While remote learning offered us the capacity to carry on during the pandemic, it cannot emulate the richness of in-person classroom experience.

Today, we are announcing that our schools will open to in-school learning for the 2020-21 school year. Barring unforeseen developments, classes will be held five days a week with a full day schedule. Both before and aftercare at our schools will also reopen. We believe our small class sizes, coupled with the support of our parents and the school community, will allow for the safe reopening of our buildings. The capabilities of health officials and health care providers in Maine to test and track the virus have greatly improved, and health experts have a better understanding of how to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

In conjunction with the Diocese of Portland, our administrative team has been and will continue planning for a safe and efficient opening in the fall for our schools. Following CDC guidelines for reopening schools, we are in the process of modifying our classrooms and facilities to successfully comply. Additional cleaning supplies have been ordered, and extra staff is being brought on to assist. Once the diocesan health measures and policies are finalized, your local school principal will communicate them to you and make you aware of their specific plans. We are confident that our schools' health protocols and processes will keep our school environments as healthy and as safe as possible for all members of our communities.

With this said, know that school will not look the same as it did when we left in mid-March. We are preparing now to meet all of the CDC guidelines. The most current CDC guidelines may be found on the CDC website: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/schools-childcare/schools.html>.

We recognize that there may be some families who may not feel comfortable sending their children to school for any in-person learning experiences in any configuration this upcoming year. Please know we understand that some family situations may have a greater cause for concern than others. As such, the Diocese of Portland is assisting each of our schools to develop a virtual, distance-learning option where interested families will still be able to receive instruction for children in core content areas while remaining connected to their local school community. We ask that you contact your principal should you want to continue with distance learning for the next school year.

Our Maine Catholic schools remain committed to working in a spirit of cooperation with our local and state officials when possible as we all seek to advance the common good of our communities. We recognize that parents are the first teachers of their children, and we fully understand that you have made a cognizant choice and firm commitment to ensure your child receives a Catholic education. Though there are many alternatives to Catholic education, there are no substitutes, and we thank you for your continued support and prayers. Please be assured of my prayers for you and your loved ones.

May the Holy Spirit continue to guide and direct us,



Marianne Pelletier
Superintendent
Maine Catholic Schools