



DIocese of METUCHEN

OFFICE OF SCHOOLS

March 10, 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As information about the coronavirus (COVID-19) continues to dominate new cycles, I want to reassure you that, as always, the safety of our students, faculty and staff is our top priority. Since it has been two weeks since my last correspondence with you, I wanted to write to share some additional steps our school communities are taking in response to the virus.

First and foremost, all of our actions are guided by local, state and federal health authorities. I have been in regular contact with the New Jersey Department of Health, Department of Education, and Governor Murphy's office.

Our schools are taking normal flu-season precautions when cleaning and are giving extra attention to frequently touched surfaces. As is always the case, our schools have procedures in place to ensure students and staff who become ill at school will be attended to and sent home as soon as possible. The administration of each school is vigilantly monitoring their school's illness-related absences and the overall health of students and faculty, so they can be as proactive as possible in preventing the spread of illness. As an added precaution, if you are travelling out of the United States, please notify your school's administration before your child's return to school. In addition, our students are regularly reminded to wash their hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds; to cover their mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and to throw away tissues; and to avoid touching their eyes, nose and mouth.

You are likely aware that Governor Murphy has declared a State of Emergency. While the State of Emergency does not affect schools at this time, we have been diligently working with our schools to develop contingency plans, so we are ready to respond if widespread illness causes more significant impacts, such as mandated school closures. The diocesan Office of Schools is working with each school individually, on a case-by-case basis, to best determine if schools will need to schedule an early dismissal to allow for staff training on virtual instruction or for additional cleaning measures.

Both the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and World Health Organization indicate that children are not particularly vulnerable to the virus, and therefore, the risk to our schools is low. However, in the event that school closures should be mandated, rest assured that our schools will be prepared to provide our students with virtual instruction.

To help prevent the spread of illness in our parishes, the Diocese of Metuchen advised parishes to take the following precautions during liturgical services:

- As is practiced in so many of our parishes already, priests, deacons, and extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion are urged to practice good hygiene, washing their hands and using anti-bacterial hand sanitizer before and after distributing Holy Communion.
- Any individual who is sick or has flu-like symptoms should not attend Mass or other Church gatherings. Mass is broadcast on several television channels and also livestreamed on the Cathedral's website: stfranciscathedral.org, so the sick can make a "spiritual communion" until they return to good health.
- The sign of peace should be exchanged without physical contact.
- Distribution of the Precious Blood of Christ from the chalice is to be suspended. Furthermore, no member of the faithful is obliged to receive the Body of Christ on the tongue; worthy, reverent reception by hand is preferred until otherwise notified.

The entire press release and more about the Diocese of Metuchen's response to the coronavirus can be found here: <https://diometuchen.org/coronavirus>

It is important to remember that the handling of the spread of a serious contagion like the coronavirus is primarily a task for public health agencies. We will continue to monitor and follow the directives of the CDC and the New Jersey Department of Health. Again, school closures will be determined by the New Jersey Department of Health. For the latest available information from the CDC, please visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the coronavirus, you can call the hotline 1-800-222-1222, which will bring you to the County Department of Health.

Please be assured that while this is a rapidly evolving situation, we are regularly monitoring the coronavirus and the potential impact it could have on our school communities. If circumstances surrounding the virus change, I will update our school communities and will provide updated guidance to school administrators.

Let us continue to pray that those who are effected by the coronavirus.

Sincerely,



Dr. Robert A. Lockwood
Superintendent of Schools