



Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools: Preparing Scholars, Leaders, and Saints

March 20, 2020

Diocese of Knoxville Catholic Schools
805 S. Northshore Drive
Knoxville, TN 37919

Dear Faculty Members of our Diocesan Catholic Schools:

During this time of uncertainty, I have been in frequent contact with your school principals or presidents, as well as, other school leaders as we have worked to plan for a transition from in-school instruction to school closures and at-home learning. I would first like to commend the tremendous work of your school leaders who have been trying to stay ahead and prepare for every potential change with the COVID-19 recommendations as we maneuver through this unprecedented situation. They have shared with me the efforts that each of you have taken to make this experience as positive as possible and to continue to provide educational experiences for our students that are standards-based and meaningful! Thank you for these extraordinary efforts, for your professionalism, and your flexibility! I know that many of you may have not had much of a spring break or you returned from break with this additional burden. I want to stress to you how grateful I am for your dedication and service to our students and their families! You all are truly what makes Catholic schools so special! I would also add to be charitable towards yourself---things may not go perfectly, but it will be okay.

Our professional colleagues in Chattanooga have already entered into their at-home teaching and virtual instruction. The word that I am hearing is that they are performing like rock stars! As the schools in Knoxville, Oak Ridge, Johnson City and Kingsport follow suit this upcoming next few weeks, I am confident that I will hear similar comments about our educators. I know that, for most of us, we were not trained to conduct virtual or remote learning classrooms and we were not afforded the time to quickly adjust and plan as we would normally when approaching a new methodology. So, I reiterate that I am so amazed at how you are meeting this challenge!

Adjusting to this new learning approach may continue to take a little time, but I hope that you will continue to embrace it with an enthusiastic spirit and a charitable heart. I would offer the suggestion that you exercise discretion in your instructional planning. The learning environment for our students has also changed and it may be difficult for them to get work completed. From my own personal experience, it has been increasingly difficult to focus and get my work done with distractions of my pets and needs of family members within the house. Therefore, I would encourage you to make this as simple as possible for yourself and for your students and their families. Focus on the standards and essential learning. I also would recommend problem-based or project-based learning where standards could be inter-woven as well as various disciplines or content areas. This stream-lined approach should make it

easier on the students as well. I have attached a list of resources that may be of use to each of you. A word of caution, a great deal of people are trying to profit from this situation, so I would rely on educational resources from reputable sources that you have used in the past, such as Khan Academy. I hope that I can create a shared page of resources on the diocesan web-site and so I would invite each of you to share with me anything that other educators in our diocese may use.

As far as assessments, as I told your school leaders in our conference call this week, I am cancelling the Iowa Assessments for Grades kindergarten through Grade eight. I am expecting College Board to postpone Advanced Placement exams, but we will have to wait and see. I would encourage you to use rubrics and displays of projects. Some schools have determined drop-off days where materials can be graded. I am including this information for those schools practicing this. A study was conducted with SARS-CoV-2 and even though it was not COVID-19, I think we can draw some conclusions. On cardboard, no viable SARS-CoV-2 was measured after 24 hours and no viable SARS-CoV-1 was measured after 8 hours. Therefore, make sure that you do not handle papers for at least 24 hours from drop-off to pick-up. I would also be careful of any bins you collect the papers in, possibly using cardboard boxes instead of any plastic bins. If you would like to read the article it is included https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMc2004973?query=featured_home

Our Catholic teaching encourages us to always remember that we are a community of faithful believers—all one family under God. We are in this together and we are not alone. God will give us all what we need. We have a responsibility to work together to love, respect, and care for others in a way that will improve the well-being of every person in our community and the wider world. Our decision to shift to ‘at-home learning’ rather than our normal in school practice will help our greater communities contain the spread of this contagious illness.

I know that these next few weeks may be difficult ones and that you may miss the company of your colleagues. Your school leaders and I will make every effort to be in frequent communication with you all. We are in spiritual communion with you and are here for any questions or concerns that you may have. I may be reached through email at sprater@dioknox.org or at (865)-584-3307. Please know that you and your families are in my prayers. I have attached a prayer that Pope Francis has asked us to pray for the intercession of our Lady of Guadalupe.

In Christ,

Dr. Sedonna J. Prater
Sedonna J. Prater, Ed.D.
805 S. Northshore Drive
Knoxville, TN 37919
sprater@dioknox.org
(865) 584-3307

In this time of need, I invite all the faithful to seek together the maternal intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and I share this prayer with you:

Holy Virgin of Guadalupe,
Queen of the Angels and Mother of the Americas.
We fly to you today as your beloved children.
We ask you to intercede for us with your Son,
as you did at the wedding in Cana.

Pray for us, loving Mother,
and gain for our nation and world,
and for all our families and loved ones,
the protection of your holy angels,
that we may be spared the worst of this illness.

For those already afflicted,
we ask you to obtain the grace of healing and deliverance.
Hear the cries of those who are vulnerable and fearful,
wipe away their tears and help them to trust.

In this time of trial and testing,
teach all of us in the Church to love one another and to be patient and kind.
Help us to bring the peace of Jesus to our land and to our hearts.

We come to you with confidence,
knowing that you truly are our compassionate mother,
health of the sick and cause of our joy.

Shelter us under the mantle of your protection,
keep us in the embrace of your arms,
help us always to know the love of your Son, Jesus. Amen.