



March 11, 2020

Dear Parents, Faculty, and Staff Members,

The Office of Catholic Schools continues to monitor the guidelines being recommended by the Center for Disease Control and the Virginia Department of Health, to prepare for and respond to any potential impact the coronavirus (COVID-19) may have now that there are confirmed cases within our Diocese. As always, the health and safety of our students, faculty, and staff remains our priority.

As a result, please note the following important updates:

- **School Masses**

Out of an abundance of caution, Bishop Knestout is instructing that in all parishes, including all school Masses, the following measures will be implemented for the foreseeable future:

- Cease distribution of the Precious Blood (Christ is fully present under both species of the Blessed Sacrament)
- Refrain from shaking hands during the Sign of Peace (bow or verbal gesture is appropriate)
- Refrain from holding hands during the Lord's Prayer
- Remove Holy Water from the Baptismal and Holy Water fonts

A new web page has been implemented at richmonddiocese.org/coronavirus which provides additional safety precautions. This web page will be updated regularly with important information about our diocesan response.

- **School Closures**

There are no plans to close schools at this time. Any decisions to close schools will be made with guidance from the CDC, VDH, and local health agencies. They are the foremost public health experts, and we rely upon and follow their guidance. We are currently evaluating all possible options to help ensure continuity of instruction if a closure is deemed necessary for an extended period of time. We will communicate any new information or changes that may be necessary as quickly as possible. In the meantime, please take a moment to update your contact information in FACTS SIS (formerly RenWeb).

- **Field Trips/School-Sponsored Trips**

As a precaution, all trips outside of Virginia—are canceled for students and staff through April 9. This includes trips to Washington, D.C., as well as staff travel to meetings, conferences, etc.

For trips within Virginia— The spread of COVID-19 is continuously changing so all trips will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis at the school level.

- **Easter Break Travel**

We strongly urge families and staff to carefully review and adhere to the travel warnings and guidance issued by the [Centers for Disease Control](#) (CDC), which may change frequently.

As previously advised, if you are traveling to a country with a Level 3 Travel Health Notice (China, Iran, Italy and South Korea) that the CDC guidance states: *“Travelers should stay home for 14 days after returning to the United States and practice social distancing.”* **If required to stay home for 14 days, please notify your school immediately.**

We are asking that all families and staff traveling anywhere strictly adhere to the CDC guidance upon returning.

According to the CDC, "For the majority of people, the immediate risk of being exposed to the virus that causes COVID-19 is thought to be low. There is not widespread circulation in most communities in the United States." Some basic reminders worth repeating:

- Stay home when you are sick.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces.

Additional resources can be found through the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [Virginia Department of Health](#) websites.

Our continued prayers for all those affected by this illness and those helping to combat this outbreak.

Yours in Christ,

Kelly M. Lazzara

Superintendent of Schools

Catholic Diocese of Richmond