



# Department of Catholic Education

Archdiocese of Mobile

352 Government Street Mobile, Alabama 36602 251.438.4611 FAX 251.438.4612

July 16, 2020

Dear School Communities,

Hello again from the Department of Catholic Education. It seems like just yesterday that I was congratulating the principals, teachers, parents and students for ending the school year triumphantly. It was a challenge to all but it was completed with grace and ingenuity. Since then, you all have been in my thoughts and prayers during this very unusual summertime. Hopefully, you and your families have found some ways, though I'm sure creatively, to enjoy the summer break. Maybe you've taken a virtual trip right in your own living room, you may have been able to have a socially distanced time at the beach, or had family movie nights. However you have spent this time, I hope that you have been able to stay safe and well.

In late June, I attended all three of our Catholic High Schools' graduations. I am amazed, considering the past few months, that we were able to gather to celebrate this very special milestone. As I sat and watched our graduates walk across the stage, I couldn't help but feel gratitude. Gratitude to God, our principals, teachers, parents/guardians and students for all that went into the formation of these young people. I pray that they will continue their lives in love, caring for others and service to God.

Our priests have also been challenged by the coronavirus. Many became experts in live streaming liturgies to their parishes, hearing confessions while in their cars, ministering to families who have suffered loss and working with disappointed brides and grooms. Every aspect of our lives certainly has been touched by this unprecedented pandemic. We are all in this together!

I want you to know that our wonderful principals have not skipped a beat this summer. Because the safety and well-being of their students and employees is their top priority, they along with their COVID-19 task force, have been working diligently to make the return to school as safe as possible. We have educated ourselves in the virus' symptoms with information from the CDC, the local health department, other health professionals, and city directives. All have been used to develop comprehensive return to school plans. Each school plan has requirements that all Catholic Schools will follow, while your child's individual school plan will have many safety protocols that will fit your school community. Schools will be releasing their plans this week. Our teachers have also been working tirelessly, participating in training programs to become more proficient in the use of communication platforms, redesigning their classroom layouts and adjusting lesson plans for possible distance learning.

It's difficult to predict how coronavirus will impact us this fall, but know that we are vigilant in our efforts to stay current with health agencies' recommendations. It is our first priority to keep our students, faculty and staff safe from contracting the virus. In my last letter, I said that we were preparing for the world's new normal. I am happy to say that we have been doing just that, while preparing for our students to return to our schools. And yes, it will be a new normal for them and us, but know that we are committed to making this school year one of continued faith formation and academic excellence.

I want to take this time to thank Archbishop Thomas J. Rodi for his support and concern for his flock. He has been with us every step of the way. He too has closely monitored the COVID-19 pandemic, and with his guidance, the Department of Catholic Education is confident that our schools have put together the

best possible plans for the 2020-2021 school year. His dedication to and involvement in the ministry of Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Mobile is unparalleled.

We are living in a time unlike anything we've ever experienced. The anxiety and fear of the unknown in this pandemic has impacted us all. I understand that our school communities will experience some of this anxiety and fear as we prepare to return to our campuses. Please know that the health and safety of our faculties, staff and students is of the utmost importance, and I hope you see this reflected in each individual school's plan. Thank you for your continued partnership and entrusting your child's education and formation to us. Please know that you all are always in my prayers. I will keep you in my prayers as we begin the 2020-2021 school year.

Sincerely in the Lord,

Gwendolyn P. Byrd  
Executive Director for Catholic Education/Superintendent