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March 9, 2020

Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland Maine
Office of the Superintendent

Dear Catholic School Families and Employees:

I write to you today to provide information and request your assistance. As you have seen in the news, there has been an outbreak of a new respiratory disease first detected in China but now detected in other countries, including the United States. The virus has been named SARS-CoV-2, and the disease it causes has been named "coronavirus disease 2019" (or "COVID-19"). According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ("CDC"), it is currently spreading in the United States. We have been and will continue to monitor the circumstances surrounding COVID-19 through resources and recommendations from the CDC, World Health Organization, and Maine Department of Health. As we receive developments, it is important that we continue to receive information that is factual; and it is important that we not respond with fear but instead with care and compassion as a Catholic community.

Even before the outbreak of this virus, it is important for our school communities to be mindful of actions we can take to prevent the spread of the flu, common cold, and other viruses. If you traveled abroad within the past two weeks, the CDC has issued travel advisories for certain countries:

- Those who traveled to countries with Level 2 or Level 3 travel warnings (including China, Iran, South Korea, Italy, and Japan) should self-exclude from school and school-related activities for fourteen (14) days. If you and your family meet these criteria, please contact your principal immediately. Those who traveled to a country with a Level 1 travel warning (including Hong Kong) should follow the guidance issued by the CDC, including self-monitoring for symptoms.
- Please refer to your health care provider and <https://www.cdc.gov/> for more information.
- Any students or faculty members excluded from attending school during this time will not be penalized for absences, and schools will work with families to provide access to curriculum. If you have travel plans, you should watch the CDC travel advisories to be informed about the travel itineraries that present a higher risk for COVID-19 in returning travelers. If you will be traveling to high-risk areas, please contact your principal. Good communication will benefit all students, faculty, staff, and our communities.

Office of Maine Catholic Schools
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This office is funded in part by The Catholic Appeal

There are actions all of us can take to help prevent the spread of viruses including the flu:

- Keep your student home when he or she is ill and contact a health care provider if you or your student have symptoms, especially fever, cough, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, or any contagious illness such as chicken pox, strep throat, or the flu.
- Teach your child to cover his or her mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth – germs spread this way.
- Clean and disinfect surfaces and objects frequently touched. We will be increasing the cleaning of doorknobs/panels, handrails, and similar surfaces in the school and encourage you to do the same at home, especially if someone in your home has been sick.
- Avoid sharing drinking glasses, utensils, dishes, towels, or other items.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick whenever possible.
- Practice healthy habits and encourage your children to do the same – get plenty of sleep, drink plenty of fluids, be physically active, and eat healthy. To learn more, visit the U.S. Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>
- The World Health Organization: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
- Maine Department of Health and Human Services: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/>

I want you to know that your principal has been working collaboratively with the other Catholic school principals in Maine, the Maine Department of Education, and myself to ensure your children are safe and secure. Also, should an extended closure become necessary, we are looking at the best way to provide continuous educational services via distance learning for your child. Your principal will be providing more information regarding your school's plan.

As a Catholic community, I'd ask that you join me in prayer for those that have been afflicted by this virus. Please know that the safety and wellness of our students, staff and families is our top priority. Thank you in advance for your help as we work together to ensure student and staff safety in all our Catholic schools. And may the intercession of Christ the Healer give strength to caregivers, families, and healthcare workers bringing healing and hope.

Blessings,



Marianne Pelletier
Superintendent of Schools