



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA 26003

August 17, 2020

To our Catholic Schools' Parents and Families:

As we look with cautious optimism toward the opening of the fall semester in our Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, I want to take a moment to personally thank the principals, pastors, faculty and staff at each of our Catholic grade schools and high schools. Their work in completing the spring semester this year was nothing short of heroic, and their diligent planning for this fall has provided an opportunity for your sons and daughters to attend schools five days each week. Each school has filed a "reopening plan" with respective health officials in their counties, and we are proud to say that we have received approval from each of them to resume Catholic education on an "in person" basis. Should certain circumstances arise and we need to engage students through distance learning, we are prepared for that as well, but with a goal of returning to the classroom as soon as circumstances allow.

There are rumors, stories and innuendo surrounding state and local policies regarding "reopening" in our society, and there are even stronger opinions amongst parents and families about returning to school. While our Diocesan and local staff are not Nobel prize-winning epidemiologists, the one thing we do know for certain is that ***we have to plan our work, and we have to work our plan.*** In order to maintain adequate physical distancing space, and to decrease the flow of students within each building, several alternatives are in place that are building-specific to your school(s). Please learn now what the "new normal" is at school, and please reinforce with your children the positive steps we are taking. Your school will provide this information to you. From new desk arrangements to new hallway traffic patterns, from different recess and lunch protocols to possibly having a lot of empty seats at sporting events, we all must adjust to the new normal as it evolves—simply just to stay in school. To teach children, parents must lead the way, and there are at least four ways I ask you to do this:

First, please pray for our school employees, their pastors and our school families. We need the Holy Spirit to be present in our lives, particularly during these difficult times. Second, I ask you to trust the process and work with your principals and teachers on the modifications they are making. Your cooperation is paramount to our continued success! Third, I ask you to be a positive ambassador for your school in the community. Whether it's a supportive comment on social media, publicly thanking your teachers, or favorably speaking to non-Catholic school families about your experiences with Catholic education, we can all be beacons of hope. Finally, I implore you to be flexible and patient. Like me, this is likely your first pandemic, and we are researching and experiencing the best ways to proceed so our children may go to school. So far in West Virginia, we've learned how to shop at the supermarket differently, we've found a way to worship at Mass differently, and we can roll with the punches and get our kids back to school as well. Catholic school communities are a resilient flock!

Therefore, please review your school's plans and details regarding our students' return to Catholic school. In addition to the precautions we are taking, and in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19, your principals and pastors have made many unpopular decisions, and I stand by them. Among these, I ask you to cooperate and to encourage your son or daughter to help prevent the potential transmission and spread of the disease by wearing a mask, sanitizing hands and physically distancing. These are rules, not suggestions. I follow them, and I ask you and your children to follow them as well. I also ask that you also refrain from taking vacations or long trips in the two weeks leading up to the start of the fall semester.

Please know that I recognize that this is a challenge for everyone. I am confident that we will get through the pandemic, together, but I need your assistance to do so. Thank you for playing such important roles in the lives of our Catholic schools, and thank you again for your continued, unwavering support of your children. Your love and dedication make this a brighter world.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning of the first letter.

Most Reverend Mark E. Brennan  
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston