



November 20, 2020

**BE HEALTHY, BE VIGILANT, BE THANKFUL**

As the number of COVID-19 cases seems to be rising in reverse proportion to the falling temperatures, we are painfully reminded as we approach this holiday season that COVID-19 is far from being a “thing of the past.”

Though we may tire of hearing about them, those preventive health measures – hand washing, sanitizing, mask wearing, social distancing – remain just as important now as they were the first day of school. While caring for one another is part of our shared mission as Catholics, the health and safety of each member of our school and parish communities has never been more of a concern or a priority.

It’s amazing to think back to the time when the concept of “virtual” school was unexpected and new. Classes via computers was novel and the occasional appearance of a “celebrity guest” like Bishop Zarama helped make it an adventure. Later, when we were mid-pandemic and looking ahead to what a new school year would look like, we knew we wanted our students to have access to in-person and remote learning options, and more than 85% of our school parents said they wanted their children “in school” when the school year began. With that goal in mind, the plans and preparation for the fall started during that “adventurous” spring, and we were optimistic that once again, we were up to the challenge.

We emphasized two things as we entered into this new school year providing in-person and remote learning. One, we asked everyone in our school communities to acknowledge the tremendous efforts our teachers, directors, principals and pastors had undertaken as they instituted health, hygiene, and instructional protocols for our schools in the “new normal” of COVID-19. Two, we reminded everyone in the community that they would in some way be called upon to make sacrifices to their comfort and convenience for the greater good of having our students back in school.

As we approach the half-way mark of this school-year-unlike-any-other, I’d like to say “thank you” for the hard work and sacrifice that has made it such an overwhelming success so far.

The hard work and sacrifices have paid off. Every one of our 30 Catholic schools opened; not a single one has been closed due to COVID. As a Catholic community, we’ve not only navigated these new challenges and opportunities as we’ve provided in-person and remote instruction, we’ve been taught many new and wonderful lessons as we’ve done it during a pandemic.

Perhaps my favorite, unexpected blessing has been the rediscovery of and commitment to “community.” We knew that success would require teamwork on everyone’s part. And we’ve seen firsthand from a public health standpoint how everyone in a classroom, school or parish community is connected and shares risk. But we’ve also seen, through community cooperation and partnership how individuals can grow as a community of faith, and how as individuals, we succeed or fail to the extent that the entire community does.

This Thanksgiving I am grateful to be a part of this community in the Diocese of Raleigh as we grow in faith and love and learn to succeed, together.

In His service,  
  
Lytia Reese  
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