



July 30, 2020

Dear St. Joachim School Families,

With school beginning in a little over five weeks, I am sure there are a lot of questions going through people's minds as to whether or not we will be on campus or online and what either program will look like. In a previous communication, I specified the various measures we were taking to make our campus as safe as possible should we go back to our brick and mortar building. As you know, the Diocese is pursuing an instructional waiver for that very purpose- on campus instruction. It is still unknown at this time when and if the waiver will be granted. That said, we at St. Joachim School are busy planning for any and all educational scenarios.

The purpose of this communication is to inform you that our current focus is to prepare for the possibility of beginning the school year online, in the event that a waiver is not obtained in time and Orange County still remains on the state's Watch List, which would prohibit students returning to campus. The faculty and I will be meeting in the coming days to put together a clear plan for a robust Distance Learning program that addresses the needs of all students, actively engages students, and promises meaningful instruction. We know that there are some issues we need to address, as brought to our attention by survey results, such as consistency of platforms used, more face time with teachers, and compassionate grading policies. We also know that ensuring students are savvy in terms of the platforms being used and the expectations of teachers were main concerns this past spring. We know that we need to plug our students into livestreamed weekly Mass so that they are sharing in the liturgy, albeit remotely. Further, we know that we can increase our non-core subject presence online to help develop the whole child. Our forthcoming plan will address all of these issues and more.

The plan will also include a component for teachers to receive intensive, and ongoing professional development in remote learning, with an additional emphasis on the social/emotional well-being of children in this socially distanced environment. We know we need to build in more social time online for students so that they can connect with their classmates and feel part of the school community. Lastly, I have contracted with our technology provider, Beyond Technology, to provide a dedicated consultant for teachers during any Distance Learning period. I expect that a formal Distance Learning plan will be completed by the middle of next week, at which time I will lay it out to our school families.

This is a difficult time to be a parent of school-aged children. You want the best for your children, which is why you chose a Catholic education initially. Some parents may be weighing the cost benefit analysis of paying tuition for Distance Learning. We know that parents have other options right now, and these options may be more cost effective for the time being. We understand the economics of this situation and we respect your right to do what is best for your family. However, I urge you to consider that any Distance Learning program will be temporary. We will eventually return to campus, even if we don't start on campus, and when we do, our hope is that students will fall into the familiarity of their relationships with teachers and peers. In a time of uncertainty such as this pandemic has presented, continuity and predictability are important for children's sense of belonging.

In closing, I leave you with the first two sentences of our school Mission Statement:

"St. Joachim students thrive in a learning environment where excellent academics are infused with spiritually rich experiences. We partner with parents as their children are on their educational journey, developing the whole child: mind, body, heart, and soul."

We are committed to this mission whether we are in person or online. We know and care about our students and their families. Though it has become somewhat of a cliché, we are, truly, all in this together.

Blessings and Peace,

Mrs. Gilbert