

March 17, 2020

Dear Principals, Pastors, Presidents, and Colleagues,

First, I want to thank you for your incredible display of leadership, fortitude and courage during this unprecedented time for our community, nation and world. In a matter of days, you, your faculties, parents and students transitioned to a distance learning model, a heroic effort never attempted before. During this time of great challenge, you are demonstrating incredible resilience and conviction as ministers of the faith. On behalf of Archbishop Gomez and the entire Catholic community in the Archdiocese, thank you!

Since our last communication, questions and developments have emerged which necessitates an update to you today. As we have experienced as of late, the response to the COVID-19 crisis continues to evolve and remains fluid. Typically, we receive new guidance from public health officials mid-day, which means our correspondence may come in the late afternoon. We appreciate your continued patience and front-line leadership as you field questions and concerns from school stakeholders.

**The following represents some universal questions we would like to address:**

**Presence of Staff on Campus:** Given recent guidance from public officials at all levels of government, we advise that **employees work remotely where possible**. Where there is a need to be present on campus to facilitate distance learning, use equipment (i.e. photocopiers, devices, cameras, printers, etc.), check mail, operate the main office, deep clean, maintain/repair property, process tuition payments and other business, we advise that you maintain social distancing guidance and do not congregate with more than ten people in one space.

**Tuition Payments:** As schools transition from campus-based to distance-based learning, school staff continue to work daily to ensure our students are receiving the best instruction. As a ministry, it's important to remind parents that each parish school and high school operates on its own budget. Families, through tuition and fees, and parishes, support the ministry of the school. As a result, tuition will continue to be applied during this period.

**Payroll and Staffing Concerns:** We recognize that there are concerns about tuition and/or fees, postponed fundraisers, and other income sources used to support school budgets. If you believe you need to make this difficult decision, **please consult with your pastor and assistant superintendent before taking any action**. As the

Archbishop indicated to clergy today, parishes and schools need to work together to address the needs of employees and identify ways to assure continuity of services, marginalize disruption to employee health benefits and marshal assets during this difficult time.

**Drop-in Services:** As mentioned on Friday, we have explored the possibility of allowing schools the discretion of offering limited “drop-in” service for families who are struggling to find child-care. Due to the escalating guidance from public health officials on social distancing, regrettably, we cannot permit schools to facilitate this activity. To do so would represent a risk to children, staff and families at a time when our entire community is attempting to “flatten the curve” of the virus transmission rate.

**Community Meal Program:** We are blessed to have received a waiver from the State of California to distribute breakfast and lunches to elementary, high school students and community members 18 years of age or younger at 37 school sites (see attached list). Children **DO NOT NEED TO QUALIFY** for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program to participate. Please note: these sites are subject to change based on demand and school participation. If a school principal would like more information about how their students can access these free meals, please contact Lilia Chavez at [lschavez@la-archdiocese.org](mailto:lschavez@la-archdiocese.org), or call 213-637-7915.

**DCS Support:** The Department of Catholic Schools is here to support you. Assistant Superintendents and program directors and managers (i.e. DLI, STEM, Onward, Academic Excellence) will be communicating with you via email, text, ZOOM and phone. Where needed and on a limited basis, in-person visits will be arranged (social distancing rules apply). DCS administrative assistance will be available at the ACC to help where needed.

Like you, we are fielding numerous phone calls and emails from concerned stakeholders. It’s vital to be responsive to our community members and provide pastoral care when they need it the most. You, too, need the same, so please reach out to each other and to us when you have a question, or just need someone to listen.

**Philanthropy:** We are blessed to have many supporters of our Catholic schools who are committed to our ministry. In the coming days, we will be engaging in discussions with our philanthropic partners to identify how best to support our schools through this crisis. Our goal is to establish a coalition of philanthropic partners to address what we anticipate will be a significant financial impact to our schools, staff and communities. Please know that this is a priority for us at the department.

**School Leader Community Virtual Prayer Opportunity:** As we transition to a virtual environment, so will our fellowship in faith. We are collaborating with the Center for Catholic Education at Loyola Marymount University to offer communal prayer on



Tuesday and Thursday at noon via Zoom link until we return to in-person instruction. Please stand-by for an invitation.

It goes without saying, we are experiencing an extraordinary moment in history. We are all faced with questions, anxieties and fears. It's vital that we all center ourselves in our faith and find peace in our Lord, Jesus Christ. God has prepared us all to navigate these treacherous waters. This is represented in the incredible courage and displays of care, love and fellowship you have demonstrated over these difficult days. This WILL pass and when it does, we will emerge stronger as a faith family because of what we have done for our schools, our students, our families, our neighbors, and our Church.

Thank you for your steadfast conviction and commitment to our Catholic Christian values. I look forward to our continual communication in the coming days.

Yours in Christ,

Paul M. Escala  
Superintendent of Schools

***God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea...***

**Psalm 46:1-2**