



PROVIDENCE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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March 11, 2020

Dear Providence Family,

I apologize in advance for the length of this letter. It communicates some very significant information, so I ask that you patiently read it, as it addresses some issues surrounding the coronavirus.

This morning, we learned that Marmion Academy High School was closed today. Below is the announcement that was sent to all Marmion Academy High School families:

Fr. Joel Rippinger recently returned from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Based upon the recommendations of the CDC, the Illinois Department of Public Health, and Rush-Copley Hospital, the protocol was followed including an e-screening. Fr. Joel passed the e-screening and is exhibiting no signs or symptoms of illness and returned to the Abbey on Sunday and was at the Academy for his two classes on Monday.

It should be made clear that the CDC and the Illinois Department of Public Health does not have Israel listed as a 'Warning Level' country, so there are no additional protocols recommended by the CDC or Illinois Department of Public Health outside of those for all travelers and there is no self-quarantine recommended by these organizations for people returning from Israel at this time.

However, today Fr. Joel and Abbot John received an e-mail from the travel agency that conducted the pilgrimage with recent developments and recommendations from the Israeli health officials regarding anyone who has visited Bethlehem in the last two weeks. The recommendation is self-quarantine for 14 days, beginning with the date the individual was in Bethlehem.

As we continue to have a proactive approach and wanting to be as diligent as possible in keeping the Marmion Community healthy and safe, even though Fr. Joel has no signs or symptoms, because he visited Bethlehem on March 3, he will be in self-quarantine effective immediately. Also, while not deemed necessary by the Kane County Health Department, as further precaution Fr. Joel is being tested for the coronavirus.

This morning, we discovered one of our students, whose brother attends Marmion Academy, was on our campus. We immediately called the student's parents and requested the student return home until we received instructions from the Will County Department of Public Health. Will County informed us that there is no reason to keep the student out of school unless symptoms appear associated with COVID-19 (also known as coronavirus).

The reports of the spread of COVID-19 are concerning, and everyone is becoming familiar with simple health procedures that decrease the risk of spreading any disease, including the common cold. Here is what we are doing at Providence Catholic:

- Our Maintenance Department regularly sprays/wipes down any and all touch surfaces using either Clorox wipes, Lysol spray or two hospital-grade anti-germicide sprays. These surfaces include telephone touch pads, doorknobs and push panels on all doors (exit and entrance, bathrooms, classrooms and offices).
- Toilets and sinks are disinfected every evening.
- Every classroom has a hand sanitizer dispenser, and we will keep them filled. All offices will be issued portable hand sanitizers.
- The hallway and bathroom floors are scrubbed every day.
- Kitchen personnel disinfect all surfaces, particularly food lines and vending machine touch pads.
- We have announced the following guidelines from the **Center for Disease Control** to the student body:

There is currently no vaccine to prevent COVID-19. The best way to prevent illness is to avoid being exposed to this virus. However, as a reminder, the CDC always recommends preventative actions to help prevent the spread of respiratory diseases, including:

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Stay home when you are sick.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning spray or wipe.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after going to the bathroom; before eating; and after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
 - If soap and water are not readily available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol. Always wash hands with soap and water if hands are visibly dirty.
- The CDC does not recommend that people who are well wear a facemask to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including COVID-19.
 - Facemasks should be used by people who show symptoms of COVID-19 to help prevent the spread of the disease to others. The use of facemasks is also crucial for [health workers](#) and [people who are taking care of someone in close settings](#) (at home or in a health care facility).

If your child is sick, please do not send them to school! The CDC recommends that sick students and employees stay home if they are sick with flu-like illness until at least 24 hours after they are free of fever (100 degrees Fahrenheit) or signs of a fever (have chills, feel very warm, have a flushed appearance, or are sweating). This should be determined without the use of fever-reducing medicines (any medicine that contains ibuprofen or acetaminophen). As always, we will work with students who need to make up work due to illness.

We will watch the CDC carefully for updates and will adjust our procedures accordingly in the weeks to come. In addition, we will follow the recommendations from the **Diocese of Joliet** regarding our liturgical services:

With coronavirus spreading without clear knowledge of its cause and the implications involved in its spreading, I believe it is best to err on the side of caution. Beginning with the reception of this letter, I ask that the following be implemented immediately in all parishes and institutions.

- *Suspension of shaking hands or other physical contact at the sign of peace.*
- *Suspension of distribution of the Precious blood to the faithful at Communion time.*

These cautions will remain in force until such time as prudence dictates that our normal practices be resumed.

Please tell your children about these procedures. Let's work together to promote health and prevent the spread of disease.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Fr. Merk". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned to the left of the printed name "Fr. Merk".

Fr. Merk

JDM:ms