



PROVIDENCE CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

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Fr. John Merkelis, OSA, President

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February 4, 2021

Dear Providence Family,

My warm greeting in these cold days! And a Blessed Catholic Schools week to all! The history of Catholic education in the United States is indeed remarkable. The longest-standing Catholic school in the United States is Ursuline Academy in New Orleans. It was founded in 1727 by a group of Ursuline sisters who hoped to establish a school in the New World, but were surprised when they arrived to be charged with establishing care for the sick. They accomplished both. Moreover, what we know as the University of Michigan was co-founded by Fr. Gabriel Richard, a Catholic priest. He established schools on the frontier to educate Native Americans and girls. These were among the pioneers in Catholic education.

We at Providence are pioneers, walking in the footsteps of our mothers and fathers in faith. Remember back in August when we were called the “guinea pigs” in the “experiment” of opening school in the middle of a pandemic! Because of the dedication of the administration, faculty and staff, and the support of our Providence Families and benefactors, we are successfully providing a quality education.

Something amazing happened last week. We were facing a storm of snow and ice, and with one email and one All-School announcement, we moved to all-remote learning. At a moment’s notice we can pivot to full remote for the safety of our students when the weather is threatening. And with another email we can return to in-school learning. Without skipping a beat! We’ve come a long way!

There’s a lot going on behind the scenes at Providence. We just received word that our region has entered Phase 4. We welcome the return of athletics, but we want to participate safely. I know there will be restrictions that include players wearing masks; we will also be required to limit the number of spectators. We will face this as we have faced all of our challenges! We will

keep you informed as the situation unfolds and we develop a plan for everyone's benefit.

We have concluded our third Kairos retreat on campus. I'm happy to report that the response has been terrific, and that the experience comparable to the retreats usually held at Bellarmine Retreat House in Barrington. Everyone who participated felt refreshed and energized, and reportedly felt a brief but powerful return to "normal."

While successfully excelling in academics, we are working on a schedule that will address the emotional, social and spiritual needs of our students. The pandemic has hit them especially hard; there is a subcommittee of faculty, staff and students who are developing a program that will address these non-academic areas. More to come!

The behind-the-scenes planning rarely takes a rest. We are working on celebrations for the National Honor Society, Academic Awards and Junior Recognition Ceremony; oh, don't forget Graduation for the Class of 2021!

An important reminder. We were able to open and provide a successful academic year due to many factors; most significantly, the cooperation of our families. Recently, there have been events involving students from different households gathering and participating in behaviors that seem to flaunt safety protocols. Please communicate with us and follow our directive to keep your student home if they have attended a party with several students without wearing a mask. I am saddened to hear of students who have tested positive for COVID, and who will not disclose information in contact tracing that is essential for our effort to keep the school a safe place for all. Mutual trust and cooperation are the bedrock of our success---please do your part! You have my word that we will do ours.

Finally, everyone I know is feeling the effects of fatigue from restriction and limitation due to the pandemic. I pray for patience for everyone. Every member of the Providence Family is doing his/her best to handle the challenges associated with a global pandemic. I try to give people the benefit of the doubt and overlook the small hurts and misunderstandings that are magnified by our current circumstances. Let's pray for one another.

Blessings and prayers (ALWAYS!),

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Merk". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "F" and "M".

Fr. Merk