ARCHDIOCESE of PHILADELPHIA SCHOOLS

Catholic Education Coronavirus Taskforce Newsletter

March 31, 2020

A Message from Father Matthew Guckin Director of Catholic Mission and Identity

Know That I Am With You Always

Dear Parents,

Know that I am with you always, even until the end of time!

These words of Jesus Christ, spoken just prior to His Ascension into heaven, provide us with a great promise. Namely, that in the midst of this terrible trial, Jesus is with us for us to encounter, follow and share.

First, Jesus is with us for us to **encounter**. We've been presented with a variety of ways to encounter Christ at this time: in each other, in online prayer, in silence and, yes, in our suffering. Authentic discipleship always begins when we encounter Jesus.

But discipleship doesn't end there. Once we've encountered the One Who loves us we're then called to **follow** Him. As the days turn into weeks it's easy for us to develop a critical spirit or give in to despair. Authentic disciples follow the Lord by patiently bearing our trials and one another. Real followers of Jesus forgive others and love others...they do not simply tolerate them.

Finally, if we desire to be His disciple, we must **share** Jesus Christ. And this is the most difficult path of discipleship of all. It can be awkward (especially for Catholics) to speak publicly about our God. Nevertheless, we're commanded to tell those we love that there is a God and we're not Him. We're called to proclaim how God is helping us through this ordeal. We're told to share the Good News that Jesus Christ is with us at this time and forevermore! Try it, it's very powerful. Just do it in a way that doesn't turn people off.

Friends, Jesus Christ IS here. But we need to do our part to experience His saving power.

God bless you!

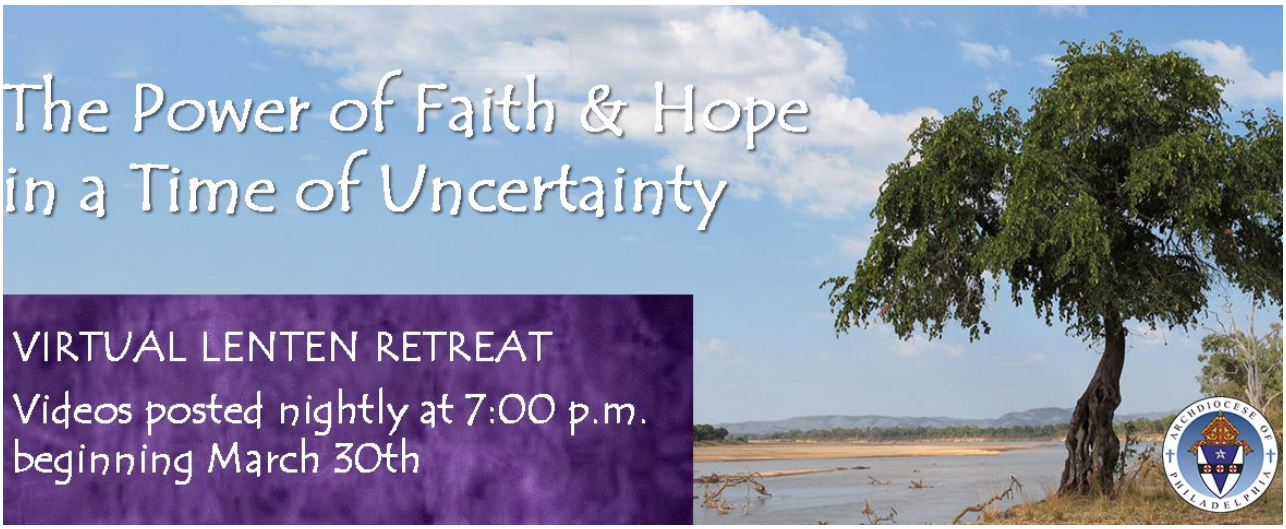
Father Matt Guckin
Director of Catholic Mission & Identity

The Power of Faith and Hope
In a Time of Uncertainty

Archbishop Nelson J. Pérez invites all Catholics to participate in a special six-day Lenten retreat presented online at 7:00 p.m. and extending each night until Palm Sunday. In a statement, the Archbishop said that: “Life as we understand it has temporarily changed, but this too shall pass. We are people whose hearts are grounded in our faith and in our hope. That is the strength that helps us during this time of uncertainty.”

The videos will be posted to Archbishop Pérez’s Facebook and Instagram pages, as well as the Archdiocesan Vimeo channel, the Archdiocesan website and CatholicPhilly.com.

OCE encourages all school families to participate in this Lenten retreat. Until we can safely be together again physically, we can pray together in spirit.



From the Office of the Secretary for Elementary Education

Elementary Education: Maintaining Strong Community Ties

Week two of the flexible instruction model demonstrated an advance on the learning curve of online education for our elementary schools. Principals participated in their second Zoom meeting with Andrew McLaughlin, the Secretary for Elementary Education, and other Office of Catholic Education (OCE) staff, who provided assistance in these unpresented times. Following these meetings, principals gathered their faculties also via Zoom sharing updates and continuing to maintain their strong school community bonds.

Teachers, students, and parents have embraced the new normal adjusting to a situation over which they have so little control. Many schools established their own YouTube channel to post videos while Facebook permits a broader audience to see the good news of their schools. Below you will find a small sampling of highlights from this week.

Many principals and teachers took to the internet to read stories to their classes. One principal, working alone in school, went to the students' classrooms to read a story in a familiar setting. Another principal dressed up as Alice in Wonderland to read *Where the Wild Things Are.* Just tuning to these online story telling sessions makes everyone smile. In some cases, the art and music teacher came on board for story time. Books were selected in which children could hear the story, learn a song, and create an art project that were later posted pictures for all to see.

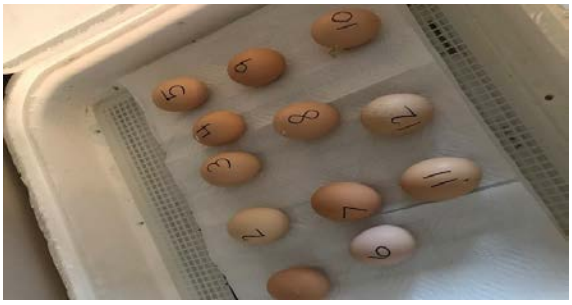
One school hosted a virtual Spirit Week for the students. Students were encouraged to wear different outfits each day focusing on themes including the school logo, local sports teams, Disney and super heroes. In a true sign of the times and as a touching tribute, on super hero day many students dressed as super market clerks, EMTs, police officers, first responders, nurses and doctors.

While there are many touching stories of what teachers and parents are doing, one which stands out is about 98 year old woman alone in a nursing home. This mother of seven always had frequent visitors and stayed involved in activities at the home. All of this ended due to restrictions placed on all nursing homes during the COVID-19 outbreak. Checking her mail has become the highlight of her day and on one such day she was thrilled to find a card from someone she did not even know. In her joy, she dialed the principal of a local elementary school squealing with delight thanking her for the act of kindness of one of her students in sending this much needed card. Through this pandemic, families are practicing the corporal works of mercy.

Social distancing birthday events are taking place with class members driving by the birthday girl and boy's homes beeping horns, displaying birthday greeting signs, and playing festive music.

Facebook has many nice videos posted of various activities. One fourth grade teacher created a clever video of each child in the class tossing the Exercises in English book to one another.

Physical Education teachers have also been engaging students through technology. On teacher created a Bingo Card with physical activities for the students to complete. Once someone has Bingo, they take a picture of their card and show it to their class. Another teacher encouraged her classes to create their own obstacle courses and post the results online.



A few schools hatch chicks during this Lenten season to demonstrate the new life of Easter to their students. Teachers, with their incubated eggs, went online to have students number and name the eggs. Contests were held on which eggs would hatch first. Teachers live streamed the hatching of the eggs to the delight of the entire family viewing chicks pecking through shells to begin their life.

It is clear that while everyone seems anxious to return to school itself and traditional classroom instruction, adults and children are adjusting. Throughout these two weeks, many individuals report that their technology skills have increased rapidly. Teachers and students are falling into a rhythm of online learning. Week two resolved some of the problems of week one and week three will be even better. During these days, we may all thank God for our faith and stay true in prayer.

From the Office of the Superintendent of Secondary Schools

Secondary Schools: Meeting the Challenge with Faith, Creativity, and Commitment

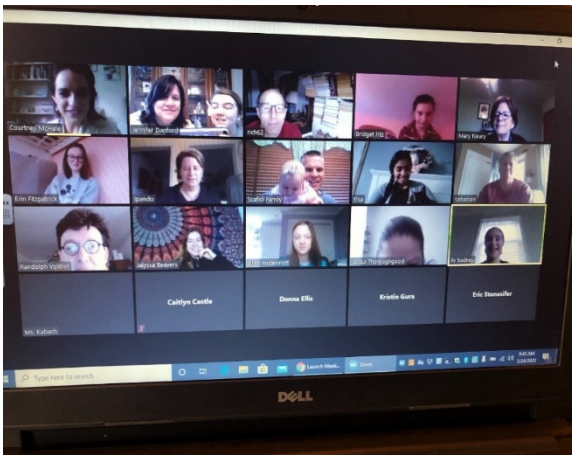
Catholic Schools
Learn. Serve. Lead. Succeed.

Week two of our new normal in Catholic education is now in the books. Last week, both Secondary and Special Education teachers demonstrated their enhanced tech talents by continuing to engage and challenge their students using tools that weren't necessary until just recently. Lessons have quickly become more interactive and focused on the essence of the curriculum. We are so very proud of our teachers for their willingness to embrace a new instructional structure that allowed us to provide an almost immediate transition from in school to online learning.

Since Archdiocesan high school students are digital natives, they naturally and quickly embraced the endless possibilities these tools present to help support community building within their school and beyond. For some schools, providing public service announcements for their fellow students became important. For others, like Archbishop Ryan and Archbishop Carroll, engaging in a school spirit challenge helped to connect students. Our AOP administrators, teachers, staff and students have answered the challenge with faith, creativity, and commitment. What you will see in these pictures is what helps to make our AOP schools simply amazing!

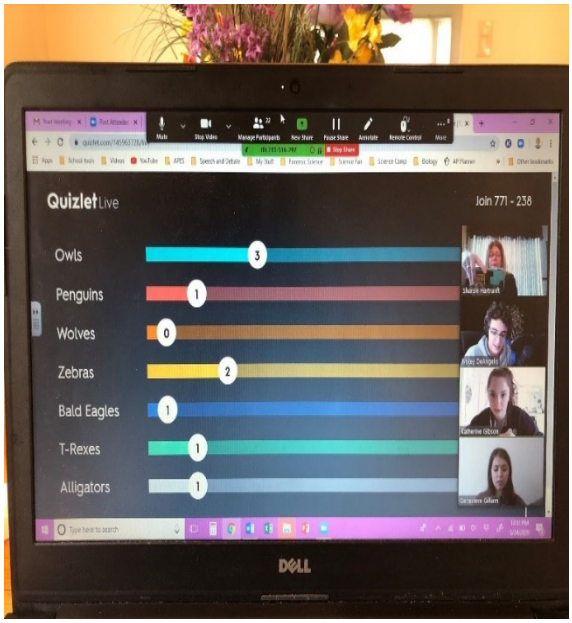
Little Flower President Jeane McNamara delivered unused food to local food pantries.

Bonner-Prendie is hosting an at home Spirit Week to help students stay connected and have some fun.



St. Hubert's Campus minister, Courtney McHale, holds a call to prayer on Tuesday morning. Members of the student body, faculty, staff and administrators joined.

Pope John Paul II Student Council, Executive Board via Zoom to create a competition between homerooms called Panther Madness. Each student was asked to send in a selfie showing their PJP pride.



Science students at Archbishop Wood explored the world of forensics by participating in an online project. Each student was assigned a criminal case and had to find out how forensic science was used to solve the case. Students are now creating video "news reports" to share their findings.

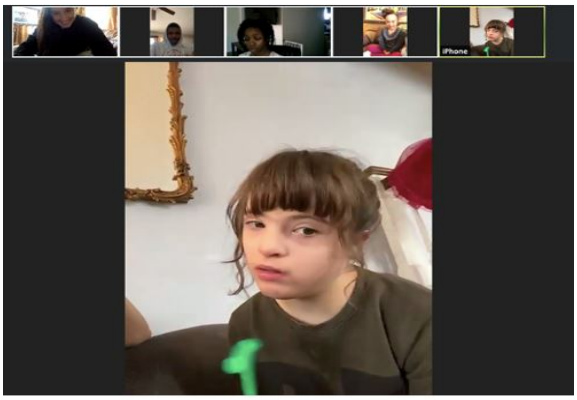
Roman Catholic students continue to show commitment to their brother Cahillites by creating public service announcements to keep students focused and safe.

Our Schools of Special Education:

Learning Together Even When Apart

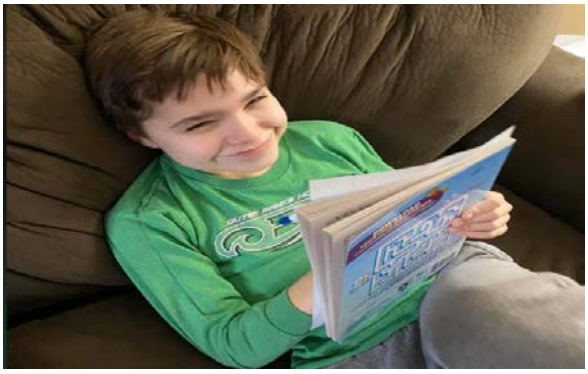
Students from the four Archdiocesan Schools of Special Education have joined the students of the elementary schools and high schools in the shift to on-line and at home learning. Teachers and support staff have developed innovative digital ways to continue working with their students while the students and their parents have met the challenge and have continued to actively engage in the learning process. Because of everyone's commitment to one another, they have continued to learn together even while they are physically apart.

Lainey, a student at St. Lucy's School for the Visually Impaired, is streaming her class using the computer. She has both her iPad and Braille Writer ready to complete her assignments. We are in awe of you, Lainey.



Students in Room 4 at St. Katherine's Day School enjoyed morning circle time digitally. They had fun talking to their friends and showing off their pets.

Mr. Jake of Our Lady of Confidence School conducts a Saturday music therapy class for students.



Who says learning at home isn't fun!

Caring for Our International Students with Encouragement and Compassion

We often hear, “it takes a village”, and our international program highlights the global community in a poignant fashion. Our international students and their families face a unique challenge as they navigate the current situation far away from each other. While some students reside with close relatives here, the majority of our students are represented by agencies. These students reside with host families in our communities.

The compassion and competence shown by this network knows no borders. Our agency partners work tirelessly as liaisons with student families. They work to communicate as much as possible in real-time, with much of the communication extending far into the night and early into the morning.

Our host families provide a foundation of encouragement and support, assisting our students as they work through their on-line platforms. They continue to care for their physical needs while offering emotional guidance to the young people in their care.

The commitment of our faculty members and administrators in facilitating these students’ learning and their extended families stands as a testament to best of Catholic education, embracing universal values on both a local and global scale.

NO SLOWING DOWN AOP STUDENT-ATHLETES DESPITE COVID-19

Student-athletes across the AOP high schools have continued to maintain their physical conditioning and sharpen their athletic skills as best they can while organized school athletic activities are on hold. Bishop McDevitt Varsity football head coach Mike Watkins sent student-athletes workout routines that they could do at home, while Varsity girls' soccer head coach Tom Quintois provided specific conditioning and skill-building drills for members of the Archbishop Carroll program.

"It's important the students maintain their routines and stay sharp physically and mentally while working toward achieving goals," says Quintois.

Lacrosse goalkeepers Hope Hannings and Conor Flanegan of Lansdale Catholic live in close proximity to one another, and the duo has tried to stay sharp by working together on different drills specific to goalies. In the case of Pope John Paul II junior baseball student-athlete David Wagner, just playing catch in the backyard can help keep his arm sharp while getting outside to enjoy the sunshine.

We pray for health and happiness for all of our AOP student-athletes during this difficult time, and are so proud that you are finding productive and creative ways to keep active in pursuit of your athletic goals!

A Glimpse of Student Learning