



**April 27, 2020**

**Dear Montana Catholic Schools teachers, staff, parents, students, and principals,**

Governor Bullock's recent announcement has given local schools control over whether they will return to school or cancel school entirely beginning on May 7<sup>th</sup>. The Catholic schools of Montana will not return to direct face-to-face instruction this school year but will continue to deliver remote learning.

We are thankful for the tireless efforts of our dedicated teachers to transition to this new type of instruction and are grateful that our schools have kept our students challenged and connected. Because we know that not every student would return to school if we began holding classes, we would have to present a hybrid learning-at-home/learning-at-school model and it would be asking too much of our teachers to transition to another type of instruction in May. We also believe that it would negatively impact student learning by changing their routine again. It is difficult to imagine our students practicing social distancing after being away from each other for so long.

We are allowing schools to make local decisions on opening their early learning centers, on making one-on-one tutoring available, holding an All-School Mass (respecting rules for social distancing, of course), connecting our students together, or perhaps bringing students back for testing and/or checking out. These decisions are dependent on the school's ability to implement social distancing protocols to protect the health and safety of our teachers, staff, and community as well as monitoring local health department guidance. We also expect to implement some type of graduation ceremonies for our seniors and 8<sup>th</sup> graders. Again, the logistics of those ceremonies will be made at the local level.

We are expecting that this virus will continue to disrupt our lives for the near future. We expect that at some point next year, remote learning will again be necessary—whether for vulnerable students, for an entire school, or the entire state. To that end, we are giving schools permission to end any time after May 22<sup>nd</sup> so they can devote planning time to prepare for the fall along with other Catholic schools. School leaders have expressed a desire to bring in high quality professional development to improve their remote learning programs in case they are needed.

Thank you for your support of our Catholic schools. We are grateful for the efforts of our dedicated teachers and committed staff members as well as our supportive parents and fantastic students.

We wish you blessings during this difficult time and will keep you in prayer.

In Christ,



**Most Rev. Michael W. Warfel**  
**Bishop of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings**



**Most Rev. Austin A. Vetter**  
**Bishop of Helena**