Religious education programs taking shape for the fall

**Diocesan Office for Parish Life offering Faith Alive! platform to parishes**

Diocesan schools preparing for safe return to in-person instruction

**SCRANTON** — In just a matter of weeks, students will return to Catholic schools for in-person instruction across the Diocese of Scranton.

As students resume classes five days a week, the experience will be different at both the elementary and high school level with numerous safety and health protocols being put into place.

“We have put together a comprehensive plan that, above all else, prioritizes the best interest, safety and health of all students, faculty, staff and school families,” Jason Morrison, Chief Executive Officer and Diocesan Secretary of Education, said. “We are excited to welcome our students back to the classroom to provide the academically excellent and faith-filled experience that our families have come to expect.”

The last time students were in class was March 13. As cases of COVID-19 began to spike in Pennsylvania, Governor Tom Wolf ordered all schools closed as a precaution. Catholic schools in the diocese quickly transitioned to distance learning the following school day.

The back-to-school plan is being spearheaded by a Diocesan Health and Safety committee, which is comprised of diocesan and local school administration and clergy along with medical professionals with expertise in pediatrics, healthcare administration and quality assurance. Each school has also created its own committee to help implement and guide the reopening process in its respective building.

“Catholic schools are inherently a partnership between the parent and the school. This is never more important than at this time and an even greater partnership is now needed,” Catholic Schools Superintendent Kristen Donohue said. “Each day will actually begin with parents monitoring their child’s health. With parental cooperation, we will be able to keep the schools open and safe.”

Some of the key components of the Diocese of Scranton’s reopening plan include the use of cohorts, physical distancing, masks and enhanced cleaning procedures.

Cohorts, or small groups of students in the same grade, have been recommended by many health organizations as an environmental measure to prevent the spread of disease. Students will remain together for the entire day, including attending lunch, recess and classes as a cohort.

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With opening day approaching, teachers energized to return to the classroom

KINGSTON – For the last 34 years, Janet Lyons has been shaping the hearts and minds of Catholic elementary school students at Good Shepherd Academy. With diocesan schools preparing to reopen soon for in-person instruction five days a week, she is excited to return to the classroom.

“I really, truly miss the children. It’ll be nice to get back to some kind of normalcy,” the veteran educator said.

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Lyons feels the safety procedures put into place by the diocese will help mitigate any potential risks of the virus.

“I do believe they’re in the safest place they could be. They’re like my own children. As a teacher, you do treat them like that, you look at them like that. You protect them and they will be protected in this school,” she added.

Lyons teaches second grade at the Luzerne County school with her colleague, Jennifer Jones, who is also excited to get back to in-person instruction.

“The kids thrive on routine. I’m excited to make eye contact and there is nothing like that conversation one-on-one with somebody, face-to-face and just making the kids feel back to normal and comfortable,” Jones said. “It’s an opportunity to get back to teaching our faith and living our faith with these kids side-by-side. We always made that connection through distance learning but now I feel it’s a better opportunity to really embrace our Catholic identity and our Catholic faith and do what we love.”

The last time teachers were in the classroom was Friday, March 13. On that day, Governor Tom Wolf ordered all schools to close as the coronavirus began to spread in Pennsylvania. On the following Monday, March 16, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System launched its distance learning initiative.

Five months later, Jones, a parent of two children herself, will be sending both kids back to Catholic Schools in the diocese in addition to being back in the classroom herself. Both teachers and students will need to wear masks and desks will be physically distanced from one another.

“I think everything is a teachable moment. This is an opportunity to teach selflessness and showing the kids that these small sacrifices that we’re making are going to pay off for everyone and it really goes back to our Catholic identity and the golden rule – Love God and love others – and you do what you can to show your love for others in small, selfless ways,” Jones added.

At La Salle Academy in Jessup, teachers came together in person last week for a professional development day in the school’s gymnasium. With each teacher seated at their own table, the educators were learning how to use technology most effectively.

“I really feel that we have been afforded a lot of opportunities with the Diocese of Scranton in the years that I’ve worked here at least, for having those professional development sessions that are enhancing our abilities to teach the most effective practices,” teacher Shaina Dougherty said.

Since March, Dougherty said she has missed the "noise" of her classroom.

"A lot of people that aren't teachers may see that 'noise' as noise, a lot of loud kids in a class. For me, it’s all about creating a community and allowing every voice to be heard and sometimes out of that noise comes incredible things," she added.

Cody Opalka, a social studies teacher at Holy Redeemer High School, agrees that there is a special energy behind teaching and welcomes the engagement that goes along with in-person instruction.

"I’m excited and I’m positive about making it work," Opalka stressed.

When reflecting on what the first day of school will be like this year, a smile came over his face.

"I’ve had a lot of first days. This one is going to be different so the butterflies are going to be there like always but it’s going to be a good different. It’s going to be about making it safe for the students, making sure they have what they need on that first day, that reassurance, so it’s going to be more of a comforting kind of entry," he said.

In addition to in-person instruction, families in the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System also expressed a desire for a virtual option for instruction.

The Diocesan Virtual Academy will provide those families with the opportunity to begin their instruction completely online, or to transition into the Diocesan Virtual Academy, if desired, during the year.

Both options have the mission of providing an academically excellent and faith-filled experience for students. Ben Tolerico, principal of Holy Cross High School, says if parents choose a virtual education, their students will remain an important part of the Catholic school community.

"If a Holy Cross student chooses to take part in the Diocesan Virtual Academy, they’re still a part of Holy Cross. If we have any kind of activities, for example a virtual Mass, they would still be a part of that," he said.

Tolerico has spent countless hours over the summer preparing to welcome students back.

"Since May really we have been going non-stop in planning, the changing of plans, trying to figure out the right formula and it has been a lot of work. It has certainly been worthwhile work and it has just been an amazing effort and a team effort all the way throughout the top of the Diocese down to the schools in making sure we are committed to having a quality education in the safest environment possible," Tolerico added.

A life-long educator, Tolerico said since March his teachers have been willing to go above-and-beyond.

"I will never, ever be able to thank them enough for their efforts," he said.
**Q. What safety measures will schools take to protect students, teachers, administrators and staff?**

A. Each school has developed procedures based on the “Five Fundamentals of Sharing Good Health” listed below. To the extent possible, students will remain with a set cohort, usually their homeroom class, stay in one desk, and responsibly manage their own personal items to minimize the sharing of items.

1) **Daily Temperature Checks:** Temperature readings will be required daily for every person entering a school building.

2) **Promoting Proper Handwashing & Good Hygiene:** Proper handwashing and using hand sanitizer will be stressed upon entering and leaving a building or classroom, before and after lunch and at the end of the day. The uniform policy will be altered so that clothes can be laundered daily.

3) **Physical Distancing Measures:** Classroom spacing is being developed to ensure physical distancing. Emphasis will also be placed on distancing in hallways, cafeterias and at recess (if applicable). Access by visitors and volunteers will be limited and only considered when absolutely necessary.

4) **Masks will be Required:** By Order of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, students will be required to wear a mask except when eating or drinking.

5) **Cleaning and Disinfection:** Every school will increase the cleaning of classrooms, common areas and frequently touched items including door handles, light switches, counter tops, etc. There will also be increased disinfection during nightly cleanings.

**Q: Will my child’s classroom look different?**

A. Schools will spread out desks and tables in classrooms as much as possible to achieve safe physical distancing. Some furniture that is not essential to teaching may be removed to enhance usable space. Desks and tables will also be arranged so that they face the same direction. Additionally, some nontraditional classroom space may be utilized.

**Q. Will students share school supplies?**

A. No. Students will not be able to share school supplies (e.g., books, crayons, technology, etc.), including for such subjects as art and music. For any supplies that still may be shared, like computers, these will be cleaned after every use.

**Diocesan schools reopening plan includes masks, cohorts and physical distancing**

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“If we can keep that smaller group of students together, our individual students are not exposed to as many other children on a given day. If someone gets sick we know what students were near that student or teacher or individual,” Dr. April L. Troy, Board Certified Pediatrician and Pediatric Regional Education Coordinator for Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine, said. Dr. Troy is a member of the Diocesan Health and Safety Committee and is also a parent with children in the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System.

By order of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, all students, faculty and staff will be required to wear face masks when in school. Masks will be able to be removed for eating and drinking and additional mask breaks will occur at specified times outside, when appropriate physical distancing can occur.

Physical distancing will also be a fundamental practice as students return to school. It will apply not only to the classroom, but also other spaces within the school building, including but not limited to hallways, cafeterias and gyms.

“Every school in the Diocese is already working on moving desks apart and having children face the same way, because we know the risk of transmission is less in those set-ups. Each principal and their administrative support team have been wonderful in coming up with new and innovative ways to use the space inside the schools,” Dr. Katherine Lincoln, Wound Care Specialist and Chair of the Clinical Quality Care Committee at Guthrie Hospital, said. Dr. Lincoln is also a parent and member of the Diocesan Health and Safety Committee.

Even though all schools are expected to reopen for in-person instruction, some families have expressed a desire for a virtual option for instruction. As a result, the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System is also offering a Diocesan Virtual Academy for the 2020-2021 school year. It will provide families the opportunity to begin their instruction completely online or transition into the DVA, if desired, during the year.

The Diocesan Virtual Academy will include both live and recorded instruction that will follow a set schedule similar to an in-person school day. Parents interested in the DVA were asked to express their interest in that option by last week.

Just like in-person instruction, the Diocesan Virtual Academy will be intentional about the inclusion of a Catholic identity across all grade levels and subject matters. Virtual academy teachers will provide instruction for Virtual Academy students.

“Whether parents have chosen the in-person or virtual option, we will be able to partner with them to ensure their child achieves his or her God-given potential because we know each family and child so well,” Morrison said.

“Our smaller environment and assessment tools allow us to deliver a differentiated approach to each child’s education,” Donohue added. “Our dedicated faculty and administrators know each child personally and will be able to help him or her navigate the challenging nature of this time.”

More information on the Diocese of Scranton Catholic School System’s safety plan for resuming in-person instruction as well as the Diocesan Virtual Academy can be found at www.dioceseofscranton.org. The diocese’s Catholic schools serve students in four high schools and 15 elementary schools.
Church leaders seek aid for Catholic students in coronavirus relief bill

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Some of the country’s most prominent church leaders appealed to Congressional negotiators to include financial support for families to continue to send their children to Catholic and non-public schools in a coronavirus relief bill currently being negotiated.

Explaining how the deep economic recession caused by the pandemic since March has “made it impossible for many struggling families to continue paying tuition,” five cardinals, an archbishop and a bishop called for the aid in an Aug. 5 letter to Republican and Democratic leadership in the House of Representatives and Senate.

The letter, released Aug. 6, implored for “robust” assistance “to ensure that the education needs of all children are met, including children in Catholic and other non-public schools.”

Signing the letter were Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops; Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York; Cardinal Blase J. Cupich of Chicago; Cardinal Daniel N. DiNardo of Galveston-Houston; Cardinal Sean P. O’Malley of Boston; Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin of Newark, New Jersey; and Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland, California, chairman of the bishops’ Committee on Catholic Education.

The correspondence was the third plea for support in recent weeks by church leaders as Republican and Democratic congressional leadership and the administration were locked in days of negotiations over specific measures in the relief bill.

House Democrats ushered through a bill in May that contained a broad array of relief measures. Called the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions Act, or the HEROES Act, the House bill offers a $3 trillion package, including $58 billion for grades K-12.

The Republican-led Senate July 27 introduced its stimulus package, Health, Economic Assistance, Liability and Schools, or the HEALS Act, totaling about $1 trillion. It includes $70 billion to K-12 schools that open for in-person classes. It would redirect some coronavirus-relief funding to school-choice programs, so families can continue to send, or choose to send, their children to non-public schools they feel offer the best education for them.

The latest letter is the most recent appeal by church leaders to convince Congress to support families choosing to send their children to non-public schools.

On July 29, Cardinal Dolan, Cardinal O’Malley and Archbishop Gomez made a similar appeal to President Donald Trump and Congress. Their request came in a commentary for the National Catholic Register.

The Aug. 5 letter said the recession had forced 140 Catholic schools to permanently close “and hundreds more are in danger of being unable to open in the fall.” They also noted how each student educated in a Catholic or non-public school saves local school districts “thousands of dollars.”

“Nationwide, Catholic schools save state and local government more than $20 billion annually,” the letter said.

Noting that Catholic and non-public schools educate about 10% of students nationwide, the prelates requested funding for such schools at the same percentage of the total financial support for public schools in the aid package.

“The aid is essential for ensuring that Catholic and non-public schools that want to open for instruction have the means to do so, because families have the ability to send their children to those schools,” the letter said.
Congratulations Catholic High School Graduates!

Class of 2020

HOLY REDEEMER
Kimberly Ann Aldrich
Destiny Joy Andes
Joshua John Andrejko
Amanda Armstrong
Anna Elizabeth Brigid Bagnall
Meredythe Chessa Baird
Vanessa Elizabeth Barrett
Cassandra Teresa Benderavich
Caitlin Elizabeth Blaum
Sean Thomas Boland
Alexander Scott Bonk
Jacob Anthony Brennan

HOLY CROSS
Jenna LeeAnne Bradley
Maille Rose Allardyce
Svetlana Anne Baron
Katrina Josette Beaver
Clara Miriam Bergman
Logan Nathaniel Bocker

* Valedictorians

John Peter Hartridge
Madison Rose Havirlik
Andrew Christopher Healey
Camus E. Howie

Jordan Thomas McAndrew
Sarah Catherine Mies
Christian Drake Mitchell
Kathryn Elizabeth Nealon
Angelo Timothy Norella
Leahy Patrick O’Connor
Leslie Lane O’Connor
Joseph Patrick Osborne
Gabriella Elizabeth Parise
Allison Nicole Pavlowski
Samanta M. Pykus
Molly Elizabeth Repecki
Katherine Ann Rogers
Joseph J. Rossi Jr.
Keelin Ann Schimellenig
Emily Marie Schultz
Sydney Elizabeth Skrutski
Olivia Noelle Smith
Mary Margaret Stec
Andrew Michael Straka
Michaela Georganna Strasburger
Ryan Joseph Strong
Elizabeth Ann Talbot
Emily Tansley
Alexandra Christen Tomaine
Jori Emanuel Vega
Kathryn Veronica Walsh
Rory Pio Walsh
Gabriella Williams
Amanda Ann Yanul

† Salutators

Joseph Anthony Delaney
Matthew Dinh
Molly Elizabeth Dugan
James Daniel Dunleavy
Emily Ann Duris
Maria Elizabeth Egidio
Caton Fahey
Aidan Joseph Fitz
Jillian Marie Foley
Anthony John Gallis
Ryan Gardjulis
Sonal Garg
Brandon Nicholas Gebenus

Jori Emanuel Vega
Kathryn Veronica Walsh
Rory Pio Walsh
Gabriella Williams
Amanda Ann Yanul

Joseph Anthony Delaney
Matthew Dinh
Molly Elizabeth Dugan
James Daniel Dunleavy
Emily Ann Duris
Maria Elizabeth Egidio
Caton Fahey
Aidan Joseph Fitz
Jillian Marie Foley
Anthony John Gallis
Ryan Gardjulis
Sonal Garg
Brandon Nicholas Gebenus
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