

26 May 2020

Dear Principals and all Staff Members of Catholic Schools

Of Care, Concern and Courage

As we look to reopen schools, as safely as we can, we think about these first few days: Face masks. Frequent handwashing. Physical distance. And we consider the state of our hearts: some joy at seeing each other after a long time; relief to be back at school and teaching or otherwise working; a sense of pressure to make up for 'lost time'; worry as Covid-19 continues to move through our nation. It's likely a mix of all of these – and more.

Much has happened during the time we have been apart. How have each of us, and our households, fared? We've had to learn how to accommodate each other, and keep the peace. But we may have been caught in conflict and danger. We stayed home to keep ourselves and others safer. But we have friends and relatives we have not been able to visit. We know that many faced hardship - isolation, hunger, unemployment, and sickness. Death may have come to people close to us, and we may have found it difficult to mourn. So, our hearts will carry the pain of suffering or loss. And it may take a little while to find each other again, and to settle into the routines of school. In that poignant message on Easter Sunday, Pope Francis said "How many people every day are exercising patience and offering hope, taking care to sow not panic but a shared responsibility. How many fathers, mothers, grandparents and teachers are showing our children, in small everyday gestures, how to face up to and navigate a crisis by adjusting their routines, lifting their gaze, and fostering prayer." People of faith have had their sense of community strained – synagogues closed over Pesach, churches over Easter, mosques for Ramadan. Some found they grew closer to God; others felt God seemed further away.

Covid-19 confronts us with uncomfortable truths. Our lack of care for creation, and maybe for each other. We do not know when this pandemic will end, but it has already left us changed. We feel our vulnerability. In this darkness of uncertainty it is normal to be seeking sureness, clear answers. And there is very little that is sure. So we can perhaps lose our courage. It may also be that in this time we have experienced a sense of helplessness, of being frustrated in our search for opportunities to love and serve. With the opening of schools, these opportunities for mission present themselves again, and much courage will be needed.

And yet, reopening our schools is an act of hope. Education orients us towards the future of our children and our society. If our hearts are open and full of compassion, we may yet hope, and move for that change that can be for the better – for all humanity and the societies we live in, and for the one world that is our common home. Let us remember: "Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary." (Benedict XVI). And as we approach the great feast of Pentecost, **May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.** (Romans 15:13). We wish you strength and courage, and we thank you for your commitment.



Sr Kathy

Sr Kathy Gaylor op
Chair, on behalf of the CBE