



Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brownsville

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August 15, 2020

Sr. Cynthia Mello, SSD
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
700 N. Virgen de San Juan Blvd.
San Juan, TX 78589

Dear Sister Cynthia Mello, SSD, Superintendent of Catholic Schools,
Pastors with Parish Schools, Religious Superiors of Schools, and
Dear Catholic School parents, students, teachers, staff, administrators, principals and
volunteers,

Over these past several months we have had to confront extraordinary challenges; the COVID 19 virus pandemic has altered the way each of us go about our day-to-day lives. The ways we go about educating our children have been particularly affected. Our students, teachers, staff and parents confronted the challenges faced last March by working tirelessly to transition to on-line learning to complete the school year. While our buildings were closed, our schools were open as teaching continued and learning took place. Then as now, we have had one focus, the health and safety of the students entrusted to our care, as we help them continue their Catholic education in the best ways possible.

It is now time to begin a new school year, and to do so with an awareness that the COVID-19 virus continues to present a substantial threat to our communities. We must continue to help our young people and their families stay as safe from infection as possible, and also help them deal with the emotional, psychological challenges this virus brings.

Our principals are committed to opening our catholic schools for 5 days a week for in-school instruction as soon as is reasonably possible. When we do open our classroom doors, all of our students will observe social distancing and other important safety protocols under the direct supervision of our principals and teachers. CDC protocols will be strictly followed. Our principals and teachers have been very creative in finding ways to utilize classroom space and other facilities within the schools to meet the challenges presented by the virus.

All of our Catholic Schools have been working during the summer months to create a Re-opening School Plan Manual in preparation for face-to-face instruction. Principals, teachers and staff will implement these plans so that our students can return safely to a healthy and happy environment. Each school will be specific with their guidelines according to the layout of their campus.

All of these Re-opening School Plan Manuals have been put together by committees made up of administrators, teachers, parents, and medical professionals. The interest is the safety of all children returning to a safe building and a safe learning environment. These Plans have been and will be reviewed and updated to make sure all areas of the CDC guidelines, state, local and church authorities have been incorporated to insure safety. Our Re-opening School Plan Manuals will be shared with parents prior to the start of school, so that parents will know the plan before the schools open. Each school has received the required equipment such as thermometers, masks, sanitizer, etc. to help with the guidelines and safety of all students. Finally, Professional Development days have been set aside during the month of August to begin putting these School Plans into action and making sure all staff is trained and everything is in order for the re-opening of school.

We are all aware that local civil authorities and health officials are issuing particular health advisories that affect when the public schools in particular cities and towns may open for face-to-face instruction. While the Church's schools are not bound by these civil directives, we do have an obligation to work together with health authorities to protect the safety of students and of the whole community. I have consulted with local county authorities, and all agree that the vulnerability of the Valley to a continued high infection rate is of great concern.

In making a decision about when we can begin face-to-face instruction in our Catholic Schools we must look first to our local situation. It is very serious. We have to think of our students and of our teachers, of volunteers and administrative staff as well. And we have to think of the parents and grandparents that await them all at home when the school day is over. And we must think of the good of the whole Rio Grande Valley.

Consequently, I am directing that our on-line (remote classes) begin at our Catholic Schools on Monday, August 31st for grades Pre-K through 12. Our on-line instruction plans are ready to go. Further, I am directing that our Catholic Schools, grades Pre-K through 12, remain with on-line instruction only at least until September 28th, and that they make plans for the possibility of offering face-to-face instruction on that date. When the day comes that we do welcome our students back to the school campus for face-to-face instruction, we will do so with the concerns of parents at the forefront of our minds. Thus, the parent or guardian of any child who has an underlying health issue can contact the school principal and make that known, so that provisions can be made for continued use of on-line learning. Further, any parent who has a concern about their child returning

to class-room learning at the time of re-opening is invited to contact the school principal and discuss their concerns, so that they can be appropriately addressed. The important thing is that our schools will be prepared to offer face to face instruction, and also on-line instruction that can serve those students who will need it, following the learning criteria set by the school.

I wish that I could say that our plans are set in stone, and will not change. But that is not the reality we are living today. We must be vigilant, and prepared to adjust our plans to developing conditions. One of the factors we must watch is the infection rate in the Rio Grande Valley. Today, it is quite high, even in comparison with the rest of the State of Texas.

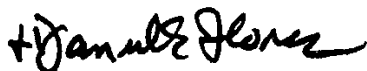
Our schools will each be sharing with parents the health safety protocols they have prepared. They will also be available on-line. I urge parents to take advantage of the time before face-to-face classes begin, to become familiar with these plans, and to ask any questions you may have. We want parents and our local communities to feel confident in our safety plans, and we want our children to have the best possible opportunities to learn.

I ask for your continued vigilance as we seek to limit the impact and spread of this virus. Please follow the health recommendations local officials have urged. Wear your mask in public, practice social distancing, use disinfectant frequently.

On this the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven, let us ask our Lady to intercede for us all here in the Rio Grande Valley, and to offer us her maternal protection from her place in heavenly glory. I ask for your continued prayers for all those who work so hard in our Catholic Schools for the benefit of our students. I ask also that you pray for me, as I seek to fulfil my responsibilities as a Shepherd. With God's help we will work together for the good of our communities during these difficult times, confident that the Lord Jesus will guide us through to better days.

With an assurance of continued prayers for all in our Catholic School community, I remain,

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Daniel E. Flores". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Rev. Daniel E. Flores, S.T.D.
Bishop of Brownsville