Dear Friends,

When I ask younger children about the meaning of Christmas, “presents” is usually one of the top answers given. If you tune in to TNT in a couple of days, for 24 hours straight, you'll hear Ralphie ask for “an official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred Shot Range Model Air Rifle!” To which we instinctively respond, “You'll shoot your eye out.”

I suppose we could become cynical and say Christmas, for most people, has been reduced to gifts and materialism. But if we think about it in the right way, might this actually be a good thing? After all, Christmas is about receiving the gift of Jesus Christ. Christmas, in its deepest meaning, is about gifts and the material; it's about the Word becoming flesh. It's about God taking on a human nature in a material world so that we can encounter Him.

More than two thousand years ago, a child was born to a young woman while her husband, a carpenter, cared for her. The world has never been the same since. The birth of the Word as a human being is the central point of God's creation.

The progress of the world takes its meaning from this birth. The Lord God, the Creator of the Universe, the One who formed the very stars that announced the birth in Bethlehem, sent His Son into the world. God is Love become flesh.

The Christmas story is a present reality, not just an historical fact. The world is still being transformed by the birth of the Savior and by love becoming flesh. We are the modern shepherds called before the presence of Christ right here, right now. We are the modern Magi called to complete a journey of love.

We have to ask whether Christmas makes us happy because of the gifts and the family time, or if Christmas makes us happy because we have a Savior. Is God alone enough for us this Christmas season, or do we want something more? There is nothing more than God! He brings joy, happiness, and hope.

Peace,

Father John Donia
It’s beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Just poke your head into anyone of our schools and you will see. Let’s take a deeper peek at how our students are supporting Santa and his Elves to make the Christmas holidays special as everyone prepares for Jesus, the real reason for the season. Also, note how our Catholic traditions are taking place virtually such as the lighting of the Advent Wreath.

**Holy Cross Regional Catholic School**

The Holy Cross Regional Catholic School community came together to provide complete Thanksgiving meals to 254 local families in need. Led by JP and Jason, our mission to serve others through this year’s annual Thanksgiving food drive was a huge success. The dress down day we had raised money to provide turkeys and fresh produce. Thank you to our 8th grade students who helped gather the food items and the families that helped deliver our donations to Martha’s Choice Marketplace in Norristown.

Also at Holy Cross School, our kindergarten classes sing an Advent song and light our Advent Wreath daily. They are learning the events leading up to Jesus' birth with their Jesse Tree and by creating a Christmas Story book. Each day they "travel" to a new country to see how others celebrate this holiday season during their Social Studies class. Being located in Montgomery County, who was shut down for two weeks, Holy Cross kindergarten students seamlessly transitioned to virtual learning and have enjoyed working as a class while seeing their friends and teachers via the computer. They look forward to learning to read, add, and subtract over the next few months.

From the Office of the Secretary of Elementary Education

**Elementary Schools Continue Their Outreach During the Pandemic**

Picture of Justin (6th grade) and Jason Jandrisitz (3rd grade), Group of 8th graders helping collect the canned goods from each classroom, Jason dropping off goods at Martha’s Choice Marketplace.

Picture of Mrs. Jackson, lighting the class Advent Wreath while teaching kindergarten virtually.
Saints Simon and Jude School in West Chester carried on the tradition of its eighth grade Christmas Pageant. Students and teachers went above and beyond to bring the school community this very special and joyous occasion. With Covid-19 restrictions, the students did three performances versus one, so the students and faculty could have an in-person, socially distanced experience. Eighth grade parents were also invited to attend one performance and it was live streamed on the school’s Facebook page for virtual students, parishioners, and extended family members.

Saint Andrew School, Newtown

For the Advent season, the families, faculty and staff of Saint Andrew Catholic School, Newtown have participated in a diaper drive to benefit Catholic Social Services in Levittown.

Aurelia Loffreda-Mancinelli, aka Lola, an eighth grader at Saint Andrew Catholic School in Newtown, Bucks County, conducted a coat drive entitled Lola’s Coats That Count. She set up a box at the school, created fliers, advertised in the school newsletter and the parish bulletin. Lola collected 168 new and slightly used coats to donate to the less fortunate. She washed, sorted and delivered the coats to A Woman’s Place and the Bucks County Homeless Shelter.

Assumption Academy

PreK students at Assumption Academy are working hard on their fine motor skills while creating beautiful Christmas tree ornaments to bring home as gifts to their parents.
Holy Innocents School

The students attending Holy Innocents School are collecting new mittens, hats, and gloves and they are putting them on their mitten tree. The items will be given to Project Mercy before Christmas. The PreK 4 class really enjoyed visiting the tree to make their donations.

Virtual Rosary

On Thursday, December 3rd, the feast of the great missionary, Saint Francis Xavier, the leaders of the Missionary Childhood Association (MCA) hosted a virtual rosary for our schools. Bishop John McIntyre joined Ali Holden from the MCA along with students from five schools: Saint Jude, Saint Francis Xavier, Saint Eugene, Blessed Trinity, and Saint Jerome.

Students from each school responded to one decade of the rosary in unison. Blessed Trinity students participated virtually. Following the Rosary, Sister Lisa Valentini, MSC, spoke to the students about the missions. Our schools strive to have active participation in the missions and the Rosary demonstrates one way in which it is done.

Saint Mary Interparochial School Learn How to Draw and Screen Print on Fabric

The 8th grade class at Saint. Mary’s has been working throughout the fall with their Artist in Residence, Katie Kaplan, along with The Fabric Workshop and Museum. Students first learned about different plants and their place in nature (i.e.: symbolism, ecological characteristics), observing some in the Magnolia Garden adjacent to the school. Students then chose which plant they would focus on for their one-color screen-print on fabric. Through this project, students have learned foundational drawing skills and Naturalist Illustration, while also learning how to screen-print on paper and fabric! Each student’s design was screen printed on a tote bag and on a square of fabric at Fabric Workshop and Museum while the class watched on Zoom. These squares of fabric will be joined into a collaborative design to be hung permanently in the school hallway.
Virtual Learning in the Elementary Schools

Drexel Neumann Academy

Teachers at Drexel Neumann Academy have been working so hard, it's nice to share the good things that they are doing. The School is all virtual, but instruction is still going strong.

Our 4th graders are discussing the Advent season and what the wreath symbolizes.

The PreK students made Henrietta hedgehog pictures with leaves. The hedgehog is part of the PATHs program which is a social emotional curriculum that was purchased through the support of grants from the Ambassadors Fund and Ethel Sergeant Clark Smith Fund.

Saints Simon and Jude

A fourth grade honors math student at Saints Simon and Jude School in West Chester raises her hand for her teacher who is teaching virtually from her home. Flexibility has been the key to success with a combination of in-school and virtual instruction. On this particular day, the math class had three in-person students, three virtual students, one virtual teacher, and Sister James Columb, IHM in-person with the class.

Saint Eugene

Second grade teacher, Mrs. Valerie Hart, has created a virtual bulletin board to hang her virtual learning students’ work. She posts it on ClassTag, her daily communication site as well as her website. She updates it monthly with their artwork to match her classroom board.
Also at St. Eugene, they are celebrating Holidays Around the World. Students are currently traveling around the world, stopping at seven countries learning all about their holiday including traditions, foods, and celebrations. They locate the country on the map and learn about their holiday. After their travels, they stamp their passports and fill in a fun fact we learned.

Saint Jerome

The COVID crisis has imposed many restrictions on the classroom setting. At Jerome School, they utilized their beautiful campus and the comfortable fall weather to take the learning outdoors. It was a great way for the students and teachers to socially distance, get fresh air, stretch their legs, and enjoy the scenery! The teachers have maximized their time outdoors to give the students a more spacious and comfortable learning environment.

Queen of Angels, Willow Grove

Congratulations to the 5th grade at Queen of Angels! They have been selected to participate in the finals of The Rendell Center for Civics and Civic Engagement’s challenge on the Electoral College. The students worked diligently with Mrs. Galbreath & Mrs. Behan to create an essay and video for submission! You can enjoy the video here: 5th Grade Video in Support of Electoral College. The virtual finals were held during the school day on December 15.

While the K-8 students were home virtually for the last two weeks, Sister Mary made sure to start each day with morning prayers and the Pledge of Allegiance. Students enjoyed this morning ritual even from home.
Thanks to Mrs. Carter and our Student Council who held a pie drive for Thanksgiving. Over 212 pies were collected to be delivered to families in need through an initiative with Representative Ben Sanchez. The Student Council reps were good sports with the raffle winners who were able to "pie" them! It made for a lot of fun and joy in knowing students were helping others.

_Saint Albert the Great_

Montgomery County School, St. Albert, prepared for the return of students to the building on Monday, December 7. Mrs. Castor and Mrs. Brunetti created a Winter Wonderland for the students to be welcomed back. All of the decorations were recycled or reused items. #satgbettertogether. Here is the link to our FB page and also some photos. [https://www.facebook.com/Saint-Albert-the-Great-Catholic-School-102521931559046](https://www.facebook.com/Saint-Albert-the-Great-Catholic-School-102521931559046)

_Holy Rosary School_

Finally, _Holy Rosary School_ completes the elementary schools section, as two second graders put a piece of hay in Baby Jesus’ crib so that He will have a soft bed to lay when He comes. What have you done for Advent to prepare for Jesus coming that would allow you to add soft straw in the manger?
Advent – A time of joy and hope!

We all look forward to Christmas and the New Year 2021, with anticipation for a hopeful and joyful year and the blessing that the Christmas season brings. This Christmas we are so grateful for our teachers who entered the school year armed with dedication, much new technology to master, and a mask and Plexiglas. Yet, in these first month the Secondary Schools of the Archdiocese have become models in modern Catholic education. Here are some of the joyful and hopeful moments:

- **Saint Hubert’s High School** received high accolades from the Middle States Accreditation Team, who referred to St. Hubert’s as “a vibrant and wonderful school.”
- Both **Conwell-Eagan Catholic** and **Bonner-Prendie Choirs** entered the B101 Christmas Choir Contest and are currently semi-finalist.
- Bishop Shanahan produced their annual musical “Elf” and live-streamed it so that parents, grandparents, and Shanafans would be able to enjoy the production.

When you’re hopping around the Christmas Tree…remember...

Since the beginning of the school year, we have been blessed with a small percentage of cases across the 17 Secondary Schools and the 3 Schools of Special Education. In fact, less than 2 percent of our students suffered from COVID, and in the schools of Special Education there has been only 1 student case. We believe that this because of the fidelity to the school safety plans, especially related to wearing masks and maintaining social distance. It is our great hope to be able to resume our hybrid education, but so much of this depend on our families’ fidelity to the same COVID precautions during the Christmas holidays. To keep everyone safe, please consider guidance of the CDC.

- Wearing masks when in any group.
- During this Christmas season, don’t risk gatherings outside the home.
- Celebrating virtually or with your immediate household is the safest choice this winter.
- Wear your **mask** over your nose and mouth, secure it under your chin, and make sure it fits. Indoors or outdoors, you are more likely to get or spread COVID-19 when you are in close contact with others for a total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period.
- Remember that people without symptoms or with a recent negative test result can still spread COVID-19 to others.
- As much as possible, avoid crowds and indoors spaces that do not offer fresh air from the outdoors as much as possible. If indoors, bring in fresh air by opening windows and doors.
- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing and before eating.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a **hand sanitizer** that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid touching your mask, eyes, nose, and mouth.
A New Year full HOPE

With COVID vaccines on the way across the country to health care workers and the most vulnerable, there is now hope of a safer and healthier 2021. There is hope, and so we wait for our turn to receive the vaccine.

Most recently the NCEA shared on aspects of the COVID vaccines, noting:

Among the current Operation Warp Speed list, 5 of the 8 proposals are considered to be “ethical” based on expert scientific analysis concluding that they did not rely upon aborted fetal cells for their design, nor do they use such cells in their production (Novavax, Moderna, Merck, Sanofi, and Pfizer-BioNTech). The expert analysis comes from Dr. David Prentice and his fellow scholars at the Charlotte Lozier Institute (CLI) and can be seen in this excellent document: An Ethics Assessment of COVID-19 Vaccine Programs.

May 2021 be a great year of hope for all!

Spotlight Articles

In each edition of the Coronavirus Update, we will provide articles with helpful tips and expert recommendations on social and emotional related issues and concerns.

The Importance of Sleep

The amount of sleep we regularly get actually does matter. Sleep impacts our physical and mental health and good sleep habits can support your overall wellbeing. In this article, Dr. Ariel Williamson discusses why sleep is important, especially during this time. She also provides help for parents trying to build good sleep habits in their children, no matter what their age.

Why Sleep Matters for Mental Health Especially During a Pandemic

Fighting COVID Fatigue

Since March of last year, each of us have been dealing with the uncertainty, the fear, the frustration and the loss that accompanies living during a global pandemic. This has led to what is now being called “COVID Fatigue”. In her brief yet informative article, therapist Nicole Yarmolkevich, discusses the reasons for COVID Fatigue and suggests ways we can cope with these feelings.

COVID Fatigue and How to Fight It
Mental Health Emergency Contact Information

Click here for a list of emergency contacts for each of the five counties.

From the Coronavirus Taskforce Chairperson

Hope and Perseverance

The hard work of our teachers and staff along with the patience and perseverance of parents and students enabled our schools to open in September 2020 and our teachers to deliver a strong educational product during these past four months. With vaccines now ready to be distributed in a stepped fashion, there is light at the end of the tunnel and hope that our lives will return to normal someday.

The data from our schools has shown that the strong safety protocols we put in place at the start of the school year have been effective in keeping students and staff members from getting the virus in school. The cases that schools have are from incidents that occurred outside of school. Quick action on the part of parents to notify us of cases and collaboration with health departments has enabled us to quarantine where appropriate to keep the virus from spreading.

As you are aware from reading the news, the community spread of the virus in our area is extremely high and the months of January through March are expected to be peak months. Therefore we must persevere through the winter and continue with our strong safety protocols. Since the cases we do have our coming from gatherings outside of school, we need parents and students to be particularly careful during the Christmas break to avoid having a spike in cases in January. Please read and follow the CDC’s recommendations for Winter Gatherings.

As Archbishop Pérez often says, we are a people of hope. The source of our hope and what unites us as a family in faith, is Jesus Christ. May joy be your gift at Christmas and Faith, Hope and Love be your treasures in the New Year.

Hope and Perseverance

From the Coronavirus Taskforce Chairperson
Celebrating Winter Holidays

Everyone Can Make Winter Holidays Safer

• Celebrating virtually or with the people you live with is the safest choice this winter.
• Stay home or cancel your gathering if you or someone who lives with you is sick or has been near someone who thinks they have or had COVID-19.
• If you do gather with people who don’t live with you, outdoors events are safer than indoor events.

Wear a mask

• Wear a mask indoors and outdoors.
• In cold weather, wear your mask under your scarf, ski mask, or balaclava.
• Keep a spare mask in case your mask becomes wet from moisture in your breath or from snow or rain.

Stay at least 6 feet away from others who do not live with you

• Stay 6 feet apart from others, indoors or outdoors.
• Remember, people without symptoms or with a recent negative test result can still spread COVID-19 to others.

Avoid crowded, poorly ventilated indoor spaces

• Avoid crowds and indoors spaces that do not offer fresh air from the outdoors. If indoors, bring in fresh air by opening windows and doors.

Wash your hands

• Wash hands often or use hand sanitizer.

Get a flu shot as soon as possible

• Getting a flu shot can help stop the spread of flu and lower hospital visits and serious health problems from flu.

cdc.gov/coronavirus
Attending a Winter Holiday Celebration

Make celebrations safer by following the steps that everyone can take and take these additional steps.

- Plan ahead. Talk with the host about expectations.
- Bring your own food, drinks, plates, cups, and utensils.
- Avoid shouting or singing.

Hosting a Winter Holiday Celebration

If having guests to your home, be sure they follow steps that everyone can take to make celebrations safer. Steps you can take include:

- Plan ahead. Have conversations with guests to set expectations.
- Limit the number of guests.
- Provide unused masks for guests and ask everyone to wear them inside and outside.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces and items between uses.
- If celebrating indoors, make sure to open windows.
- Have a separate space for guests to wash their hands or provide hand sanitizer.

Food and Drink at Holiday Celebrations

Food traditions are a part of many holiday celebrations. There is no evidence that handling or eating food spreads COVID-19, but always follow food safety practices. Make sure to:

- Use single-use options, like salad dressing and condiment packets, and disposable items like plates and utensils.
- Avoid sharing food and utensils with people who don’t live with you.
- Use a touchless garbage can, if available.

Winter Holiday Travel

Travel increases your chance of getting and spreading COVID-19. Staying home is the best way to protect yourself and others. If you do travel

- Check travel restrictions before you go.
- Get your flu shot before you travel.
- Always wear a mask in public settings and on public transportation.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from anyone who does not live with you.
- Consider getting a viral test 1-3 days before your trip, as well as 3-5 days afterward.
- Reduce non-essential activities for 7 days after traveling, even if your test is negative.
- If you don’t get tested, consider reducing non-essential activities for 10 days.