



**TO:** Diocese of Crookston Catholic School Families and Staff Members

**FROM:** Andrew Hilliker – Director, Office of Catholic Schools

**DATE:** June 9<sup>th</sup> 2020

**RE:** Path to Reopening Diocese of Crookston Catholic Schools

Catholic School Families and Staff of the Diocese of Crookston,

The 2019–2020 school year will be forever marked with closure, distance learning, video conferencing and physical distancing. I hope it will also be remembered by a strengthened sense of community and appreciation for the graces God has provided us during these challenging times.

Catholic Schools across the Diocese of Crookston have embraced distance learning by jumping in with both feet, recognizing its contribution to education at a time that demanded a quick and decisive response while in uncharted waters. We have learned a great deal about distance learning and if we have to return to that format someday, we will know the approaches, mechanisms, and plans that work best for our schools. As helpful as distance learning was, it does not replace or compare to the deep and broad approach Catholic schools offer. Over and over there was lamenting for what was missed most: being together at school to learn, pray, worship, and develop meaningful relationships.

While distance learning fulfilled an immediate need for educational instruction, we are preparing to return to the classroom for in-person learning across the Diocese of Crookston. The best environment for forming our students through Catholic education —mind, body, and soul — is in our buildings, face to face with the students in front of teachers who are committed to guiding them in leading lives of virtue. We are working collaboratively with the other dioceses of Minnesota, the Minnesota Catholic Conference, and the Minnesota Independent School Forum to develop a plan that allows schools in the Diocese of Crookston and beyond to bring students back to our buildings in a safe and fulfilling manner this fall.

The collaboration among Catholic school leaders and other independent school leaders across Minnesota has been humbling and powerful. Our unified voice and diverse areas of expertise will assure this work addresses the complexities of bringing students and staff back in the fall. It will also carry a strong and united voice for Catholic education in Minnesota by working with our Church leadership to maintain support across the state. Additionally, the Minnesota Catholic Conference and the Minnesota Independent School Forum will work with Governor Walz, the Commissioner of Education, and health care officials on our behalf to assure a broad consultative perspective.

Have a wonderful summer and please keep the Diocese of Crookston Catholic Schools in your prayers as we all ask our Lord for his mercy during these unique and often difficult times.

Andrew Hilliker  
Director of Schools, Diocese of Crookston