



SEEK THE LORD

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With August comes a new school year, and, with that, a sense of starting fresh and the expectation that something will be different. Never, perhaps, has that been more the case than in 2020.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the actions taken to mitigate its spread, the 2019-2020 school year ended in a way that no one could have imagined 12 months ago. Our Catholic school students, along with all other K-12 students in the state of Ohio, switched to online learning and never returned to their classrooms after mid-March. Students felt an understandable sense of loss as they missed their classmates and their teachers. And at the end of the school year, eighth graders and high school seniors lamented not being able to celebrate their achievements with a traditional graduation ceremony.

All of us, in fact, were stressed by the disruption to our lives resulting from the state's stay-at-home order and other precautions necessary to keep ourselves and others safe. The full long-term economic and social consequences of COVID-19 cannot yet be known. However, there was already much talk of a coming "new normal" well before restaurants, recreation centers, gyms, libraries and day care centers were permitted to reopen. What might "new normal" mean for our Catholic schools?

While not every step ahead is clear at this point, there are some things we do know. Most importantly, there is no change in the archdiocesan Catholic schools' mission as "Christ-centered communities dedicated to the faith formation, academic excellence and individual growth of our students, all rooted in the Gospel message of Jesus Christ." It is in the DNA of our schools to *Radiate Christ* while educating students for this life and preparing them for the life to come.

Ever since Bishop Edward Fenwick opened the first Catholic school in the archdiocese in 1825 with 25 female students under the direction of a Sister of Mercy from France and a lay

woman, teacher-ministers have fostered the mental, physical and spiritual growth of the young people under their care. They are not just teachers of the faith, but witnesses of the faith. For to radiate Christ means to witness Christ, not just talk about Christ. And this happens in every part of the Catholic school experience – including, for example, the cafeteria, the gym and the playing fields – not just in the religion classroom.

In this important role, teacher-ministers and principal-ministers partner with parents, who are their children's first and primary teachers of the faith by word and by example. Inevitably, the nature of that partnership changed this spring. Just as the domestic church – the family – became the primary center of worship while public Masses were no longer celebrated, so homes became virtual classrooms when schools closed. Our teacher-ministers and their principal-ministers adapted to meet this challenge, demonstrating the commitment for which they are well known and appreciated. For this, I am most grateful.

As you will read in this issue of *The Catholic Telegraph*, the School of Faith program supported by the archdiocese is providing doctrinal and spiritual formation for Catholic school teachers, administrators and spiritual mentors so that they can even more effectively witness and teach the faith.

Just as teachers are also witnesses, so are students. We all have a role to play in the Church, and the role of young people is not just in the future. Students already have the opportunity to radiate Christ to their peers and to the rest of the community as they contribute their special God-given gifts and talents.

As a new school year begins, with its unique challenges and opportunities, please know that all students, parents, teachers, principals and school staff are in my prayers. May you have a fruitful year of growth in knowledge, wisdom, success and, especially, in relationship with Christ, who offers us peace, joy and the fullness of life.