



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIocese of YOUNGSTOWN

August 25, 2021

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As your bishop, I want to take a moment and share with you how as a Diocese we arrived at a decision to mandate masks in our schools. Let me preface this sharing by saying that this decision has nothing to do with any political agenda but only with the common good.

In all of our schools we, especially the principals, faculty and staff, take very seriously our shared responsibility to educate your child. At the same time, we know that it is important for us to provide safe and healthy environments in which our children can flourish and grow.

Every school year offers new challenges and opportunities, and this year is no different in that regard. The context for this new year is a pandemic that stubbornly remains with us. As we continue to weather our way through this challenging time, I believe it is important for our school children and employees to be in school without interruption. At the same time, we need to be mindful of the data before us and the ongoing threat of the Virus.

In order to insure as best as possible, the beginning of a school year without interruption and given the rising numbers of the Delta Virus which we have been told is even more aggressive than Covid-19, coupled with the fact that many of our children are unvaccinated, especially those 12 and under through no fault of their own, I made a decision after much prayer and consultation with the Chief Health Official for the State of Ohio, Doctor Bruce Vanderhoff, M.D., our Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Mrs. Mary Fiala, and members of my Senior Staff to temporarily enforce the wearing of masks inside our schools in certain situations with the promise to review this matter in mid-September when we are told by the authorities that the trends and threats should diminish. It should be noted that many of our local Health Departments have added their voice to the schools in their jurisdiction strongly recommending the wearing of masks along with all of the other protocols.

In addition to providing protection from the virus, the wearing of a mask means that should someone be exposed to the virus, there likely would not be the need for a quarantine. While quarantines are important as a means of protection, they can also be disruptive to one's life. Last year was a year with unprecedented disruption that included temporary closure, online learning and in person learning with social distancing. Many people had to quarantine. Having been in a two-week quarantine myself as result of exposure, I know how disruptive that time can be.

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The decision in place is temporary and made in the best interest of our students and teachers so as to have as much as possible a year without disruption. It is also made to help stop the spread. Too many lives and livelihoods have been lost as a result of this pandemic. As more and more reports abound about children contracting the virus, it is imperative that we be sensible, rational and pro-active.

I realize that while many embrace this decision with relief and gratitude, there are others who meet it with disappointment and even anger. As a bishop, I am called to be a shepherd who leads, feeds and protects always for the good of the Church in the name of Jesus Christ. Based upon all of the data and information provided to me I stand by this decision. It is only temporary.

In his Post Apostolic Exhortation, “The Joy of the Gospel,” Pope Francis writes, “In this way it becomes possible to build communion amid disagreement, but this can only be achieved by those great persons who are willing to go beyond the surface of the conflict and to see others in their deepest dignity. This requires acknowledging a principle indispensable to the building of friendship in society: namely, that unity is greater than conflict.” (#228)

My dear parents and guardians, while this issue of temporary masks may divide us on some levels, I ask that we all step back and behold the dignity of every person. We can certainly have our own views on this matter but not at the expense of common respect for the human person or our solidarity as brothers and sisters or the heart of one of the hallmarks of our Catholic identity, unity.

The decision to wear masks in certain situations in our private schools is a temporary policy. It is my hope that for the common good you will accept this policy. We acknowledge and respect that it is always your choice as to where to send your child to school. We are humbled that you chose us. Just the same, I trust you respect that it is our right as a diocese to set policy for the good of our schools and the safety of our children and employees.

I am grateful to all those who are abiding by this policy. When we work together in a spirit of community, great things can happen. Our schools are living testimony of this fact. In the meantime, together, let us pray for better days and “That All May Be One.”

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ David J. Bonnar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Most Reverend David J. Bonnar
Bishop of Youngstown