



Friday, March 27th, 2020

Dear Students, Parents and Guardians:

On behalf of Bishop Bergie, Chair Fera and the Board of Trustees, members of Senior Staff, Principals, Vice-Principals, Administrators and staff across Niagara Catholic, I bring our shared prayers and sincere hope that you and your family are well and safe.

As we all live with the ever-changing realities of life during this pandemic, we draw comfort from our faith, and from the knowledge that the brightest scientific minds are working on preventative measures, while working towards creating an effective vaccine.

We are committed to providing you with timely and accurate information on our website, social media and directly to your phone and inbox through School Messenger. We will keep you informed as decisions are made by the Ministry of Education to continue to support student learning and, as the school closure extends, teacher-led learning.

Earlier this week, Premier Ford commented that schools in Ontario will not reopen on April 6th. We anticipate information on the extended closure of schools next week from the Minister of Education and will provide an update on our website.

As the school closures continue, we know that there are many questions regarding the remainder of the school year. We know that the EQAO Grades 3, 6, 9 and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) provincial assessments have been cancelled for the remainder of this school year. For our secondary school students, neither the OSSLT nor the length of the school closure will be an obstacle for students who are otherwise eligible to graduate in June. However, many questions remain. From the transition from supporting student learning to teacher-led learning; to events and activities, mid-term report cards, college and university mark submission, the completion of community service requirements, and confirmations, proms and graduation ceremonies; information will be provided as decision are made.

It is important that students keep their minds active during this period of school closure. That's why we have provided the dedicated *Learn at Home* page on niagaracatholic.ca for students and their families, which contains resources provided by the Ministry of Education, along with supplemental support resources carefully selected by our staff. We will continue to add to this information as it becomes available, to ensure you have a diverse range of support materials for students Kindergarten to Grade 12.

While we know that we cannot replicate the day-to-day learning experiences in a classroom, boards have been asked by the Ministry of Education to design plans for teacher-led delivery of curriculum during an extended of school closure. To assist us, early next week all Niagara Catholic families will receive a request through School Messenger to answer two questions: Does your home have Wi-Fi, and, do students in the home have access to a computer or tablet. Your answers will provide us with the information we require to help us design curriculum, resources and supports for an extended school closure.

Students, we know that this can be a very confusing and anxious time for you. You may be anxious about completing this school year, or your final year in elementary or secondary school as you prepare for your next journey. I'm sure there is disappointment about the many events and activities that will be postponed or cancelled this year. These are all very normal feelings, and, combined with all of the messaging we consume every day about the increasing number of cases of COVID-19 and the importance of physical distancing, it can all be very overwhelming. Be kind to yourself, your family and friends, and thank you for doing your part to keep yourself, your family and our whole community safe and healthy.

In addition to the academic resources, Niagara Catholic has created a section on our *Learn at Home* page for student and family faith formation resources, and mental health resources and supports. Faith formation resources will regularly be added to support students, families and staff on their faith journey, along with links to live video feeds to join in the participation of Mass, Adoration, and devotional prayers hosted by parishes within the Diocese of St. Catharines.

A dedicated Mental Health Resources tab has also been created on the site. In partnership with School Mental Health Ontario and Pathstone Mental Health, Niagara Catholic is committed to providing students, families and staff with updated resources to support student mental health through dialogue, activities, and crisis situations. As School Mental Health Ontario continues to provide resources, the Board website will be updated. Next week students will receive mental health information through their board e-mails, which will include how to access mental health supports if they are in crisis.

As a significant community partner in Niagara, we remain in contact with our colleagues at Niagara Region Public Health for their guidance and support. Please continue to follow their direction to wash your hands often, avoid touching your face and practice physical distancing. We have extended our collective prayers to Niagara's health care professionals and emergency responders, many of whom are parents, alumni and friends of Niagara Catholic, for their continued health and safety as they work tirelessly to keep us safe.

As members of the Niagara Catholic family, let us continue to pray that the actions taken to reduce the spread of this virus will be effective, that we remain courageous and kind to one another and for the continued health and safety of our students, staff and families.

Pray, stay healthy and safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Crocco". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "C".

John Crocco
Director of Education