



Serving twenty-three counties in Southwest Iowa



September 22, 2021

OFFICE *of the* BISHOP

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Sept. 13, a temporary injunction was handed down on HR 847, the state law that banned accredited schools from instituting mask mandates. Since then, I have received many communications regarding our COVID-19 mitigation efforts. While HR 847 includes accredited non-public schools, the temporary injunction that allowed for local control only addressed public school districts, and therefore did not provide Catholic schools relief from the original law. Our decision to continue to comply with state law has been celebrated by some and opposed by others. Many messages express a frustration that I have experienced myself. At this point in the pandemic we all can feel frustrated and discouraged for a myriad of reasons:

- an apparent lack of concern for the most vulnerable,
- disagreements about mitigation strategies, and
- exasperation that the pandemic persists.

In every moment, our faith calls on us to rise above individual dispositions to make sacrifices for the common good. We do this to serve the most vulnerable among us and to witness to the intrinsic value of every human life. Our policies have been prayerfully developed considering medical, legal, and most importantly, pastoral factors. We remain committed to helping slow the spread of COVID-19, to transparency in our policies and reporting of cases, and to providing high quality spiritual and academic formation in a safe and nurturing environment.

We also believe that when addressing people of good will who may disagree with our policies, persuasion will be more fruitful than coercion. By the grace of God may all of our works be marked by the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and not the dissensions and factions which St. Paul calls the fruit of the world (see Galatians 5:20). Navigating this pandemic has been painful and difficult for us all, but within these challenges is an opportunity to witness to our charity, unity and solicitude for our neighbor.

Faithfully in Christ,



Most Rev. William M. Joensen, Ph.D.
Bishop of Des Moines