



17th August 2020

To the Head Teachers of Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in the Archdiocese of Glasgow

Dear Head Teachers,

I am conscious that this is delicate moment in education due to the ongoing ramifications of the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools had to close for 5 months. During that time, teaching and learning was carried out remotely and supervised in person by parents and carers rather than by teachers.

For more senior pupils and their teachers, there was the worry of the SQA examinations. I do hope your pupils were awarded the grades they deserved.

Coming back to school, too, has been a significant epidemiological, educational and socio-political issue. Should schools re-open or not? Should they re-open partially or fully? How vulnerable are children and young people to the virus? How much could they spread it without knowing? How vulnerable are teachers and other school staff? What measures needed to be put in place in our schools to make them safe or at least to minimise risk? What will teaching and learning be like in these circumstances?

These, and more, are questions that have been aired and debated *ad infinitum* over the summer weeks. I appreciate very much how these issues have impacted on the personal and professional well-being of teachers. I applaud the commitment of all teachers to their profession and to the children and young people that they educate so carefully and well. I know that this coming session will not lack for uncertainty and new challenges, but I do know that our teachers, as a professional and highly-motivated body, will rise to whatever challenge they have to face for the good of the children and young people in your care.

Session 2020-21 : The Catholic School as a Community of Faith in the era of Covid-19

Your school has now opened for the new session 2020-21. I hope that things have gone smoothly in these first days and that you will be able to create a good teaching and learning environment in your school as the term progresses, despite the difficulties caused by the virus. I have no doubt that you will.

I write to you today in respect of the Catholic school as a community of faith in the Covid-19 era. I cannot emphasise enough that the pastoral care of Catholic schools is a huge priority of the Archdiocese of Glasgow and of the whole Catholic Church in Scotland. Despite the restrictions placed on us all by the obligation to cooperate in the common efforts of society to suppress the prevalence of the Covid-19 virus, I want the pastoral care of Catholic schools to continue in this session.

I have written to our priests encouraging them, in the closest cooperation with you and your senior colleagues, to find ways of resuming the spiritual, pastoral and liturgical care of our Catholic school communities. In line with the advice that SCES has offered you, I appeal to you to regard your priest-chaplain not as an external agency in respect of your schools but as an integral part of your team, and to facilitate their safe access in person and online to your staff and pupils.

I hope that you, your senior colleagues, and the local parish priest or priest-chaplain can find ways to celebrate Mass, to pray with the teachers and pupils, and to offer them spiritual guidance during this time when large gatherings are not permitted, so that your school can benefit from fully functioning spiritual, pastoral and liturgical support.

I have encouraged our priests to renew and deepen their relationships with our schools in order to confront this problematic period and to help Catholic schools be the Christ-centred communities of faith that they should be.

I suggest too that, for your own well-being in a time when you are under pressure from all sides and when you may feel somewhat isolated, you might seek the peer support of other Catholic HT's, of our diocesan HT Associations, ASHTA & APHTA, of the national associations CHAS & CHAPS, and, of course of SCES.

Sacraments for Children

An unfortunate casualty of the pandemic and the consequent closure of our churches and schools has been the suspension of programmes of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Now that both schools and churches have re-opened to some extent, we need to offer the boys and girls who missed out the opportunity to receive these Sacraments.

As regards First Confession and First Holy Communion, I have advised our priests to catch up with these as soon as it is considered possible. I have advised them to consult the children, their parents and you, the schools, who are so much involved in the catechesis and preparation of the children for these Sacraments. Although the children were being prepared as lockdown stopped everything, they will require some

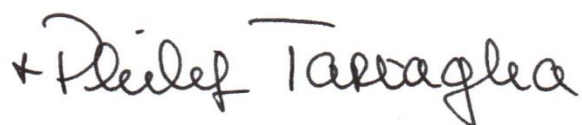
supplementary preparation to refresh their devotion and knowledge. The Archdiocese of Glasgow RE Office is ready to help with new materials for teachers, children and parents.

As regards Confirmation, the celebration of this Sacrament presents a particular problem in that the P7 candidates whose Confirmations had to be cancelled have now moved on to S1. I am deeply grateful to Catholic Secondary Schools, which have pledged their support in offering the S1 Candidates for Confirmation some supplementary preparation. Our R.E. Department is in contact with Secondary Schools in order to accomplish this objective. I hope very soon to be able to issue a plan to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation with the 450-500 young people who missed Confirmation in the time just before and after Easter.

Let me conclude by wishing you, your colleagues and your school community every blessing and success for this most unique (we hope!) school session. Among the challenges you will face, I encourage you to maintain the spiritual and religious life of your school. Jesus Christ is the centre of our faith communities. Even during a pandemic, his presence will radiate confidence, serenity and all goodness.

With all good wishes,

Yours devotedly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip Tartaglia". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small cross at the beginning.

✠Philip Tartaglia
Archbishop of Glasgow