



For Immediate Release  
March 5, 2021

Contact: John Andrews  
(909) 255-4865

## **Riverside County's Catholic schools reopening**

RIVERSIDE – One-by-one, Catholic schools in Riverside County are receiving approval from public health officials to reopen their campuses for in-person instruction.

The COVID-19 infection rate in Riverside County has fallen below the threshold of 25 per 100,000, allowing elementary schools there to begin reopening. A Feb. 25 letter from Catholic Schools Superintendent Dr. Sam Torres to Riverside County school families made the announcement.

“The principals, faculty and staff are anxiously awaiting the reunion of students to a well-prepared safe campus,” Dr. Torres wrote.

Sacred Heart School in Palm Desert was the first to open, beginning on Monday of this week. St. Catherine of Alexandria School in Riverside will welcome back its transitional kindergarten through sixth grade students on Monday, March 8. The school plans a festive welcoming environment with the members of its Student Council, while maintaining social distancing, will welcome each student as they return to campus. Music, balloon arches and banners will contribute to the celebratory atmosphere.

“It has been almost one year to date from the school's original closure in March 2020, so the students and families have expressed such an outpouring of heartfelt joy to finally be back together again,” said St. Catherine of Alexandria School Principal Theresa Heron.

Two other Riverside Catholic schools - Our Lady of Perpetual Help School and St. Francis de Sales School, will also open March 8; St. Edward School in Corona will open March 10.

St. Francis del Sales School will begin with a tribute to the students for their hard work over the past year.

“No one asked the students if the schools should shut down, or how to teach them at home, but our kids rose to the challenge and kept right up with all their work on-line,” said Kathy Piquet, Interim Principal. “The students at St. Francis de Sales have been heroic in our eyes, so we are going to honor them with a ‘Heroes Day’ at school.”

Each school is required to individually submit its reopening plans to the Riverside County Department of Public Health to receive clearance to open. San Bernardino County's Catholic schools had received blanket approval to open in mid-February after infection rates fallen below the benchmark.

Per state regulations, the reopening applies to students in transitional kindergarten through sixth grade.

The Diocese of San Bernardino has 10 elementary schools in Riverside County. Each has had reopening plans with specific health and safety protocols in place for months in anticipation of the opportunity reopen their campuses when statistical benchmarks were reached.

Measures taken at all reopened schools will include,

- Morning temperature checks for all students, faculty and staff
- Mandatory hand sanitizing throughout the school day for all
- Mandatory wearing of face coverings for all students, faculty and staff
- Students and teachers will remain in the same cohort throughout the day (no movement of classes)

Other measures taken by some of the Catholic schools include installation of three-sided plastic shields around each desk, and spacing desks four to six feet apart. Each school's reopening health and safety guidelines are detailed on its website.

The Riverside County Catholic schools will continue to offer instruction through Catholic Online Synchronous Learning (COSL).

"We also understand that some families may not feel comfortable sending their children back into the school environment," Dr. Torres states in his Feb. 25 letter. "Each school is uniquely prepared to continue offering a version of Catholic Online Synchronous Learning (COSL) in addition to the on campus learning environment."

#####