

St. Michael Academy

A CHESTERTON NETWORK SCHOOL



Executing Our Educational Mission Boldly and
Prudently during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?

Matthew 8:25

There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

1 John 4:18

For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather of power and love and self-control.

2 Timothy 1:7

THE ST. MICHAEL ACADEMY VISION

Founded in 2013 by an intrepid committee of faithful parents who wanted a Catholic high school for their children, St. Michael Academy (SMA) is both a “college prep” and a “Heaven prep” school, focused on developing the whole child – mind, body, and soul – always remembering that the ultimate goal is not merely success in this world, but salvation in the next.

The abiding vision of SMA is to create a rising generation of students filled with a sense of awe and wonder about all of God’s creation, encouraging them to look beyond the temporal and mundane towards the eternal and transcendent. With such a vision, SMA prepares students to triumph over the materialism and despair that pervade our culture and to accept the Lord’s offer to have life and have it abundantly. With its “Authentically Catholic, Rigorously Classical” approach, SMA is the logical landing spot for any family in the region that seeks a safe, nurturing, and devout learning environment for their child.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We live in consequential, yet not unprecedented, times – times that provide an opportunity for Catholic schools like SMA to remember “First Principles” and how they should guide all that we do as a Classical Catholic High School. With that in mind, and in light of the unique challenges that the Covid-19 crisis poses to our operations, below is a core set of principles to inform the way we conduct our ongoing mission to help our students get to Heaven by nurturing a new generation of joyful leaders in the tradition and truth of the Catholic faith.

We Teach the Classical and Christian Virtues

The current Covid-19 environment presents our school with a wonderful opportunity to teach and model for our students a life of moral virtue which, according to Aristotle, is a state of character concerned with choice lying in a mean, and which Aquinas observes always involves the cultivation of good habits which allows the individual to make virtuous choices in specific circumstances. In particular, the Covid-19 crisis requires the virtues of *prudence*, *courage*, and *faith* to be especially emphasized, as knowing the right thing to do in these uncertain times requires the weighing of countless trade-offs, significant intestinal fortitude and, most importantly, Christian humility which recognizes that God is in charge, and we are not.

Let’s Keep Our Eye on the Mission

As Augustine reminds us, we Christians are on a journey through the City of Man towards the City of God, which means that while we are in this world, we are made for Heaven. That is our goal, our mission, which means that we have to be fully present to each other as we endeavor to live by the Golden Rule. Consequently, any necessary modifications to the learning environment as a result of Covid-19 (and there will be several) must be reconciled with our ability to effectively form Christian ladies and gentlemen, as well as make the wisdom of western culture come alive for our students through the backbone of classical instruction: the Socratic Method.

Let’s Keep it Simple, Feasible, Flexible

Jesus taught in parables, simple yet profound stories of everyday life that his followers could understand. That focus on simplicity should inform the kinds of “Covid-changes” we make to our schoolhouse, so that our students and staff can easily understand and comply with them. Jesus was also extremely pragmatic in his teachings, tailoring his message to his audience and understanding the need to adopt different strategies for different scenarios. Consequently, our necessary adjustments must be feasible and flexible, especially given our limited resources.



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“Cleanliness is Next to Godliness”

A fundamental component of our Covid-plan is teaching and enforcing “good old common sense” personal hygiene and public cleanliness. This has always been part of the SMA experience, as we ask our students and staff to pitch in to keep the school clean and healthy, and so Covid-19 just makes that imperative even more of a reality. This is just another silver-lining example where this crisis provides an opportunity to emphasize virtues like common courtesy.

We Are Independent and Resilient

Never has there been a better time for SMA to demonstrate the advantages of its independence and resilience as we pilot a whole host of ways to keep our school open in the face of adversity. We will need to be both smart and practical in the process, prudently balancing both safety and liberty, especially the liberty to associate freely and practice our faith.

“Be Not Afraid”

Countless times did Jesus exhort his disciples in this fashion, and we would be wise to do the same. Fear, anxiety, trepidation – all are playgrounds for the devil, while understanding, counsel, knowledge, and fortitude are gifts of the Holy Spirit. As Christ reminds us, we must be as innocent as doves and as wise as serpents, which is good advice in this age of Covid-19.

Let’s Renew Our Commitment to Prayer and Work

The Benedictine mantra “Ora et Labora” – Pray and Work – has never been more apropos than during this Covid-19 episode. In this sense, prayer is not a cop-out and an excuse not to be smart and industrious, but rather demonstrates that we are putting first things first, which is our relationship with God. True and authentic prayer is the Christian’s secret weapon against maladies like Covid-19, especially if it connects us to the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

The plans detailed in this document will only succeed if they are executed in the spirit of these *Guiding Principles*, as we strive to put our faith into action with renewed intention and zeal.



EMERGING RESEARCH ON COVID & EDUCATION

Before proceeding with the specific targets and tactics that we will employ to ensure the health and welfare of our students and staff upon reopening this fall, it is wise to place our efforts within the context of an emerging set of scientific findings on Covid-19 that has important implications for how to responsibly reopen schools like ours.

We proceed under the assumptions that: (a) there are steps we can take to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 while conducting live, face-to-face instruction; (b) there are significant negative educational, social, and emotional costs to teenagers when schools are unable to conduct live instruction; and (c) with inherent risks to both opening and closing schools, it is incumbent upon SMA Leadership to consider all factors and prudently select the proper courses of action that serve the general interest of all concerned, including their educational and spiritual dimensions.

Insight from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (July 2020)

- ➔ Since the Covid outbreak, less than 100 children under the age of 18 have died from the virus. In a typical year, approximately 190 children under 18 die from influenza, 436 from suicide, 625 from homicide, and 4,114 from unintentional deaths like drowning.

Insight from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Report dated June 25, 2020)

- ➔ “Policy makers must also consider the mounting evidence regarding COVID-19 in children and adolescents, including the role they may play in transmission of the infection. SARS-CoV-2 appears to behave differently in children and adolescents than other common respiratory viruses, such as influenza, on which much of the current guidance regarding school closures is based. Although children and adolescents play a major role in amplifying influenza outbreaks, to date, this does not appear to be the case with SARS-CoV-2. Although many questions remain, the preponderance of evidence indicates that children and adolescents are less likely to be symptomatic and less likely to have severe disease resulting from SARS-CoV-2 infection. In addition, children may be less likely to become infected and to spread infection. Policies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 within schools must be balanced with the known harms to children, adolescents, families, and the community by keeping children at home.”

Insight from the Massachusetts Commission of Education’s Synopsis of Covid-19 Education Research (Report dated June 25, 2020)

- ➔ At this time, the evidence suggests schools have not played a significant role in COVID-19 transmission and that children, particularly younger children, are less likely than adults to be infected with COVID-19. Furthermore, if they become infected, it appears



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children may be less likely to transmit COVID-19 to others. Based on these initial findings, the health and safety requirements throughout this guidance, as well as considering the key features of school programming at different grade spans, the current evidence supports a safe in-person return to school with implementation details varying for elementary schools (including pre-K programs), middle schools, and high schools.

Additional References

- ➔ Schools do not appear to have played a major role in COVID-19 transmission. In a review of COVID clusters, only 4% (8 of 210) involved school transmission. (*COVID-19 Working Group. (2020). What settings have been linked to SARS-CoV-2 transmission clusters? <https://wellcomeopenresearch.org/articles/5-83/v2>*)
- ➔ In a case study from New South Wales Australia, after 18 cases were found in schools (12 in high schools and 6 in primary schools), only 0.3% of student contacts were infected (1 in 695 individuals in 10 high schools and 1 in 168 individuals in primary schools. No teachers or staff were infected. (*National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS) (2020). COVID-19 in schools – the experience in NSW. http://ncirs.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-04/NCIRS%20NSW%20Schools%20COVID_Summary_FINAL%20public_26%20April%202020.pdf*)
- ➔ In general, rates of COVID-19 infection are lower for children than for adults. Based on an analysis of data from six countries, children under 20 are half as susceptible to COVID-19 infection than adults. (*Age-dependent effects in the transmission and control of COVID-19 epidemics. Nat Med (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0962-9>*)
- ➔ Furthermore, although children under the age of 18 make up 22% of the U.S. population, they account for less than 2% of all cases of COVID-19. (*Coronavirus Disease 2019 in Children — United States, February 12–April 2, 2020. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2020;69:422–426. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6914e4> <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-response-reporting>)*
- ➔ In Massachusetts, children under the age of 19 were about four times less likely than the population at large to be diagnosed with COVID-19. Children are more likely to be asymptomatic, however, which underscores the importance of health behaviors for everyone. (*Age-dependent effects in the transmission and control of COVID-19 epidemics. Nat Med (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41591-020-0962-9>*)
- ➔ If exposed, children may be less likely to become infected with COVID-19. A meta-analysis of studies from several countries found that children were only 44% as likely as adults to become infected after exposure (*Susceptibility to and transmission of COVID-19 amongst children and adolescents compared with adults: a systematic review and meta-analysis. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.05.20.20108126v1>)*



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- ➔ In China, in households with COVID-19 exposure, children under the age of 18 were infected at a rate of 4% compared with 17% for adults. (*Characteristics of Household Transmission of COVID-19, Clinical Infectious Diseases, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciaa450>*)
- ➔ If infected, it appears children may be less likely to infect others with COVID-19. Most transmissions are from adults to children, rather than vice versa; this is different from some other respiratory viruses (*Children are unlikely to have been the primary source of household SARS-CoV-2 infections. <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.26.20044826v1>*)
- ➔ In a U.S. study of 15 households, 73% of transmissions were from adult to child; the remaining were child-to-child or child-to adult. (*Characteristics of Hospitalized Pediatric COVID-19 Cases—Chicago, Illinois, March–April 2020. Journal of the Pediatric Infectious Diseases Society. <https://academic.oup.com/jpids/advance-article/doi/10.1093/jpids/piaa070/5849922>*)



OPERATIONAL TARGETS AND TACTICS

Our strategy for reopening SMA during the Covid-19 crisis strikes a balance between performing our educational and spiritual mission *effectively* and *prudently*. The fundamental lesson learned from last spring's full closure is that while online learning can be an effective temporary substitute for face-to-face instruction, it is surely not an effective long-term option for nurturing the academic and religious virtues that we must develop if we are to remain true to our core mission. We are confident that we can significantly reduce the potential harm posed by Covid-19, thereby significantly mitigating (as we can never completely eliminate) its inherent risk.

Our post-Covid operations will be guided by values that we will term THE FOUR C's: Courage, Courtesy, Cleanliness, and Common-Sense.

Each of THE FOUR C's corresponds to one of our four major operational TARGETS:

- ➔ Target #1: We Are a Courageous School
- ➔ Target #2: We Are a Courteous School
- ➔ Target #3: We Are a Clean School
- ➔ Target #4: We Use Common Sense to Be a Healthy School

What follows are the specific TACTICS to be employed to achieve each of our operational TARGETS, allowing us to deliver our Classical Education and Catholic Formation in an *effective* and *prudent* fashion. These specific tactics have been developed after a thorough review of a variety of different resources and authorities, including the State of Michigan's "Phase Five" school reopening guidelines; recommendations from the Diocese of Gaylord; best practices promulgated by the Chesterton Schools Network; and independent research and deliberations by SMA's own Board of Directors, faculty, and staff. Finally, and most importantly, we turn most emphatically to prayer that our actions will be inspired by and in accordance with God's Will.

Taken together, we pray that our FOUR C's and our FOUR TARGETS will promote a school bursting with charity, confidence, and Christian community.

TARGET #1: WE ARE A COURAGEOUS SCHOOL

Remain Focused on Our Mission

- In spite of likely persistent challenges and distractions during this school year, SMA will strive to remain focused on its mission to nurture and elevate a new generation of joyful leaders, educated in the Classical Tradition and the Truth of the Catholic Faith.



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- SMA will continue to be attentive and responsive to the needs of the whole child: spiritual, social, physical, emotional, and intellectual.
- In consideration of these objectives, and recognizing a significant and growing body of research that live instruction is beneficial for most children, we are committed to remaining open for onsite learning and formation, whenever possible, 5 days per week.

Support Faith and Resilience

- SMA will promote prayer for courage and prudence in the face of the virus, drawing upon the riches of the Catholic tradition to help students, parents, and staff trust in God's providential care in the midst of turmoil and disruption.
- SMA has the proven nimbleness and capacity to provide instructional continuity to its students during this Covid-19 crisis, and will utilize its experience from last spring to develop even more effective "hybrid" platforms, combining both live and distance learning systems as appropriate for the length and severity of any given disruption.
- SMA's independence allows for it to improvise and adapt to a variety of unforeseen circumstances, providing authentic educational opportunities that other larger, more bureaucratic schools will find difficult to match.

Model Both Courage and Prudence

- SMA knows that its individual students, parents, and staff have very different risk tolerances, which is why we will allow flexibility and personal responsibility when implementing common sense mitigation measures that balance health, welfare, learning, and faith. One size does not fit all, even for an intimate school like ours.
- SMA's education and faith mission is essential for the well-being of its families, which is why we consider it both a public service and a profile in courage to do everything we can to continue offering live instruction and formation for our students.
- SMA's classical approach to learning showcases the wisdom of the age for its students, with the unique benefit of providing them PERSPECTIVE, which is very much in demand these days. Persevering despite adversity is a calling card of a Christian leader, and that kind of leadership can only be taught face-to-face by example.

TARGET #2: WE ARE A COURTEOUS SCHOOL

Stay Home / Go Home When Sick

- Students and staff should stay home when sick and seek professional medical care.
- SMA will send students or staff home immediately if demonstrating symptoms at school.
- The determination to return to school should be made in consultation with health care providers and applicable public health guidelines, and then communicated to SMA staff.



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- SMA will prohibit any incentives for “perfect attendance” awards during the pandemic.
- The SMA Headmaster will function as the school’s Covid-19 designated point of contact, and his executive assistant will function as his back-up.
- The SMA Headmaster will inform families and staff of the applicable recommendations for quarantining after contracting Covid-19 (the current standard is two weeks), as well as contingency plans for alternative delivery of academic instruction during such quarantine.

Practice Personal Hygiene Measures While at School

- SMA will teach and reinforce proper handwashing hygiene (at least 20 seconds with warm, soapy water throughout day, but especially at the beginning and end of the day, before and after meals, and after using restroom).
- SMA will install several hand sanitization stations located strategically throughout the schoolhouse to facilitate proper handwashing practices.
- SMA will teach and reinforce proper respiratory etiquette through the following best practices: coughing and sneezing into a tissue, disposing of tissue, and washing hands afterwards. If tissue is not available, cough/sneeze into elbow and then wash hands.
- SMA will utilize on-the-spot corrections, and other routine monitoring and demonstration measures, to encourage good personal hygiene and respiratory etiquette.
- SMA will encourage students and staff to avoid touching their faces.

Spread Out While at School

- While moving within the schoolhouse, students and staff should seek (when practicable) to maintain at least 3-feet of space between themselves and others and, ideally, 6-feet.
- Students should not loiter and linger while at lockers/locker bays, outside of restrooms and classrooms, and at entrance and exit-ways.
- Students and staff should avoid conventional greetings and signs of affection that involve personal touching of others.

Mask When Moving; Off While Learning

- Students and staff are required to wear masks when moving from class to class, through common areas of the schoolhouse when it is difficult to spread out adequately.
- When in a learning or worship environment, students, teachers, and parents can remove their masks in order to fulfill the education and formation mission of the school.
- All visitors allowed in the school must wear a mask at all times, and non-instructional staff that accompany them must wear a mask as well.



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Effective Communications with All Stakeholders

- The SMA Headmaster will communicate to the school community its operational plan, including health and safety measures, ensuring a proper feedback loop.
- SMA will post signs, placards, and directions in high-visibility areas to promote everyday protective measures to prevent/mitigate risks of spreading the Covid-19 virus.
- SMA will continually encourage awareness regarding Covid-19 symptoms to its families and staff, along with criteria for staying at home for the health and welfare of others.
- SMA will communicate to both the school community and the appropriate health officials if any of its students or staff tests positive for Covid-19.
- SMA will communicate to the school community the parameters and criteria by which decisions will be made by SMA Leadership to discontinue live instruction for a particular period of time, as well as the particular contingency plans that would then ensue.

TARGET #3: WE ARE A CLEAN SCHOOL

Cleaning and Disinfecting Efforts

- SMA will conduct frequent cleaning and disinfecting of classroom surfaces, restrooms, lunch rooms, meeting rooms, libraries, study halls, Chapel, and entrance and exit-ways.
- After each class, teachers will designate student volunteers (on a rotating basis) to wipe-down all desk surfaces and empty trash bins as necessary.
- SMA will identify all frequently touched surfaces and clean them daily or between uses as much as practicable.
- SMA will ensure safe and correct use and storage of cleaning and disinfecting products and materials.
- Gloves will be provided and used by all staff and students conducting cleaning activities.

Maintain Adequate Cleaning Supplies

- SMA will identify the type and amount of all necessary cleaning/disinfecting supplies.
- SMA will enforce all proper safety measures for storing and utilizing these supplies.

Maintain Clean and Separate Space for Those Who Exhibit Covid-19 Symptoms

- The SMA sickbay is the designated space in which to segregate students and staff exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms and will be thoroughly clean at all times.
- SMA staff assigned to monitor those in the sickbay will be provided the necessary masks, gloves, and protective equipment to ensure the health and welfare of all concerned.



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Proper HVAC and Plumbing Systems

- SMA will check and monitor all ventilation systems to ensure effective air circulation within the schoolhouse.
- When and where practicable, windows will be opened to provide an influx of fresh air into the schoolhouse.
- All water systems will be inspected to ensure that they are safe to utilize.

TARGET #4: WE USE COMMON SENSE TO BE A HEALTHY SCHOOL

Symptom Monitoring and Screening

- All staff members will undergo daily temperature checks at the beginning of the duty day to monitor their capacity to deliver instruction in a healthy manner.
- SMA will encourage all students and staff to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of Covid-19 through regular health checks.
- If students and staff begin exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms during the day, a temperature check will be utilized.
- If deemed necessary, SMA will also conduct temperature checks of students when the health situation in the school (and/or in the community) warrant such action.
- Any health checks of students and staff by SMA personnel will be conducted safely and respecting the privacy of said individual(s).

Caring for Students/Staff Who Become Sick During School with Covid-19 Symptoms

- SMA will separate students and staff who develop Covid-19 symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
- Students exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms will wait in the designated sickbay until their parent/guardian can pick them up from school.
- The SMA Headmaster will communicate with the affected student's family regarding the current public health guidelines regarding Covid-19, along with SMA's procedures governing the safe return of the student to school, which currently includes being symptom-free for at least a week within an inclusive two week quarantine period, during which time the student will participate in classroom instruction via Zoom conference.
- Symptomatic students and staff sent home from school will stay home until they have tested negative or have completely recovered according to applicable guidelines.
- Families will be notified of any confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the school.
- The SMA Headmaster will communicate with any affected student's family regarding proper protocols for reporting Covid-19 contractions to applicable health authorities.



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- Local public health officials will be contacted if a confirmed case of Covid-19 is identified. Confidentiality of the identity of the student or staff member will be maintained. SMA Covid-19 mitigation protocols will be made available.

Adjusting Classroom Environment to Prevent/Mitigate Possible the Spread of Covid-19

- SMA will array classroom desks, chairs, tables, lab stations, and other learning areas so as to maximize space between students while at the same time maintaining most conducive learning environment, to include U-shaped “seminar-style” configurations which facilitate Socratic dialogue.
- To the degree possible, while consistent with learning priorities, SMA will limit the use of shared objects in various educational settings, such as lab equipment, art and musical instruments and supplies, and will clean them thoroughly between uses.
- SMA teachers will seek to maintain at least 3-feet, and ideally 6-feet, between themselves and their students during ordinary classroom instruction. Individualized instruction, including one-on-one demonstrations of specific concepts, will be conducted sparingly and only when absolutely necessary.

Limiting and Regulating Large-Group Gatherings

- SMA will continue to conduct regularly-scheduled Forums, employing adequate spacing between all in attendance.
- Until a viable Covid-19 vaccine becomes available, SMA will pursue virtual activities, events, forums, etc., in lieu of such endeavors as field trips, assemblies, special guests, parent-teacher nights, pep rallies, mission trips, student retreats, etc., as is practicable.
- SMA will pursue options to convene and participate in sporting events in ways that prevent/mitigate the risk of Covid-19 transmission to players, coaches, families, and community members, in accordance with MHSAA guidelines as practicable.

Visitor Policies during Covid-19

- SMA will post expectations for visitors outside the school entrance clearly and visibly that detail the following:
 - ✓ No entry of visitors if they are displaying any Covid-19 symptoms.
 - ✓ All visitors must wear a mask, and wear it properly.
 - ✓ All visitors are to report to the front desk and as much as practicable, remain there for the duration of their stay. SMA front-office staff required to interact with outside visitors should also don a mask for that particular circumstance.
 - ✓ If visitors must move within the schoolhouse, they should be advised of all SMA health and welfare protocols and, wherever practicable, avoid close proximity to SMA students and staff.



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- Parents and other volunteers with assigned duties at SMA will be apprised of, and will comply with, all schoolhouse Covid-19 protocols, policies, and procedures.
- Prospective families and shadow students touring the school will wear masks and practice social distancing while inside the school as SMA makes common-sense efforts to provide a proper orientation experience. All students and staff required to be in close proximity to prospective families should don a mask for that particular episode/timeframe.
- VIP's, guests, donors, and other "friends of the school" should also wear masks and practice social distancing, and the SMA staff interacting with them should do likewise.
- Efforts should be made by SMA personnel to limit non-essential visitors to the school.

Regulating Student / Staff Movement at Arrival, During Instructional Day, and Dismissal

- Upon arrival, students should expeditiously drop-off cell phones, go to their lockers, and then immediately report to homeroom, where they will stay until the first period bell rings. Homerooms should be arrayed so as to maximize distance between students.
- Students should not loiter outside locker bays, restrooms, classrooms, Chapel, Forum, Lunchroom, Library, Study Hall, or other common areas.
- When moving from class to class, students should frequently utilize the hand sanitizing stations throughout school, get to and from their lockers quickly, and arrive promptly at their next classrooms, without congregating near classroom doorways. Wandering is not acceptable, especially now. For students and staff, "Mask When Moving."
- Students assigned to study hall and the computer lab during free periods should maximize the space between one another.
- When utilizing the bathroom, students should not linger inside the facility, and should then return to their assigned classroom via the most direct route possible.
- At dismissal, SMA will look to utilize a variety of methods, including homeroom-centric routines that maximize cleaning opportunities and minimize proximity to the entire student body.
- When awaiting pick-up, detention, after-school club meetings, rehearsals, and practices, students should remain in designated areas and not wander aimlessly through the school.

Lunch / Food Service Policies

- Until otherwise directed, students will eat lunch in their homerooms so as to minimize their interaction with entire school community.
- All dining surfaces should be cleaned prior to meal, and thoroughly cleaned afterwards.
- Until further notice, all large school gatherings involving food and drink will be reduced to a minimum. When such events are warranted, food and drink should be individualized so as to minimize multiple-person contact with utensils, serving dishes, foodstuffs, etc.



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Transportation Plans

- Transportation to and from SMA for such necessary activities as athletic practices, rehearsals, etc. will be done such that space between participants is maximized.
- Students will not be allowed to ride with other students unless a written permission is obtained and filed with the SMA front office.

Mass, Forum, Confession, and Prayer

- The SMA Chapel has been reconfigured to allow for more worshipers and also for more physical space between them.
- SMA Mass protocols will conform to all necessary diocesan directives as interpreted ahead of time by the particular Celebrant.
- Until further notice, SMA Mass will be limited to SMA students, staff, and parents only. Parents are asked to notify the office in advance so proper distancing can be maintained.
- The Sacrament of Confession will continue and will be encouraged, with the Confessor maximizing space between the students and him.
- Forum will also continue as in the past, but in a manner that maximizes space between those in attendance.

Athletics

- Students and staff must use proper hand hygiene techniques before and after every practice, game, or gathering.
- Participants will confirm to coaches that they are healthy and without symptoms prior to any practice, game, or gathering.
- Equipment must be disinfected before and after use. Sharing of equipment should be minimized when possible.
- Indoor weight rooms and physical conditioning activities are currently allowed, per MHSAA guidelines, but social distancing should persist as possible and equipment sharing should be avoided.
- Spectators are allowed at events with an expectation of adequate social distancing.
- SMA Leadership will maintain communication with MHSAA regarding their athletic and competition policies for the 2020-2021 school year.

Student & Staff Welfare

- The SMA Headmaster will ensure that regular, routine, and individualized encouragement and counseling will be conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain the health, welfare, and morale of our students, teachers, and staff.
- The SMA Headmaster will conduct periodic meetings and all-school Forums during the Covid-19 pandemic to maintain the health, welfare, and morale of our students and staff.



CONTINGENCY PLANNING

According to a wide variety of policymakers, educational experts, health officials, and Church leaders, it is wise for high schools operating in this Covid-19 environment to develop contingency plans that will allow them to continue academic instruction during periods of increased pandemic severity and through multiple delivery methods. We agree, and below are different approaches to learning that SMA is prepared to offer in the 2020-2021 school year depending upon the circumstances we face and the actual danger posed to the health and welfare of our community.

We learned a lot from the recent spring lockdown and our subsequent Online Learning Initiative. While we do not want to replicate that approach for many reasons, the episode did teach us that we can indeed do distance learning, if needed temporarily, in an effective manner.

Decisions to implement these contingency plans will be judgment calls by SMA Leadership (Headmaster, Board of Directors), with the benefit of the communication/feedback loop already in place as a result of the Covid-19 mitigation measures – along with a whole lot of prayer!

PLAN ALPHA:

LIVE INSTRUCTION WITH COVID MITIGATION MEASURES

Essentially, Plan Alpha is the Classical and Catholic education and formation that SMA ordinarily provides, only with the many Covid-19 mitigation measures (as detailed in this document) fully implemented. The expectation is that all enrolled students are expected to receive instruction at the schoolhouse in the conventional manner. If a student becomes ill from a non-Covid illness, they are expected to make up work in the ordinary way, communicating with their teachers, consulting Renweb, and requesting assistance from their fellow students. In other words, it's just regular school, with the Covid-19 mitigation measures in place.

PLAN BRAVO:

LIVE INSTRUCTION / MITIGATION MEASURES / CONCURRENT ZOOM

Plan Bravo is a “Hybrid” approach, with live classes in the schoolhouse, but with teachers also livestreaming and recording their classes with their laptops via the Zoom conferencing platform for any student or students who may have contracted the Covid-19 virus.



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Plan Bravo would be triggered when a student is kept out of the schoolhouse due to their having contracted the virus. In that case, the impacted student would be expected to continue their studies once they are well (though still quarantined at home), with recorded classes uploaded via Zoom to Renweb, along with any other course materials also uploaded on Renweb. All teachers with that student(s) would be required to provide that online learning model as long as necessary.

Once the student is determined to be Covid-free and cleared to return to school, he or she will be expected to return to live instruction at the schoolhouse. SMA staff will also investigate other, more exacting, mitigation measures to implement, if necessary, to maintain live instruction.

Plan Bravo would be appropriate in the circumstance that there are only a few documented Covid cases at SMA, that it was controlled, and that the number of cases was not rising rapidly. It is important to note that students who have not contracted Covid-19 would still be expected to come to regular live classes at the schoolhouse. In other words, one or two cases of Covid-19 which are being managed effectively would not be a valid reason for a healthy student to forgo the benefits of face-to-face instruction and formation. SMA Leadership will work closely with individual families to tailor policies to their needs when circumstances warrant.

PLAN CHARLIE:

LIVE INSTRUCTION/MITIGATION/ZOOM/STAY-AT-HOME OPTION

Plan Charlie is essentially the same as Plan Bravo, only that there would be more than a few, but not a critical mass, of documented Covid-19 cases at SMA, so that it would be prudent to allow those “healthy” families whose risk tolerance would militate toward keeping their children at home, to be allowed just that option. It would also allow, of course, those families who want to continue to avail themselves of live instruction to have that option as well. In this way, our independence and flexibility would redound to the benefit of all of our students.

With regard to classroom logistics, teachers would conduct live classes that would also be livestreamed and recorded via Zoom and uploaded to Renweb. All students choosing to stay at home would be required to satisfy all course requirements, and would be held to the same standards as “at school” students. The expectation is that once the Covid-19 “spike” was reduced, that all students learning from home would be strongly encouraged to return to the schoolhouse for live instruction.



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PLAN DELTA:

NO LIVE INSTRUCTION/TEMPORARY ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Plan Delta is a worst-case scenario where government officials have forced the closure of all schools, including private, independent, Catholic schools, and SMA Leadership recommends compliance for the health and welfare of its families and staff. Accordingly, all instruction would move to online learning, but unlike last spring, there would be a significantly more “Live Zoom” classes, and a more flexible assessment model that takes into account learning barriers that, as we discovered last spring, impede the effectiveness of distance learning with teenagers.

Under this scenario, SMA would seek to operate under Plan Delta for no more than four weeks, and if it appeared that there was no end in sight for the state-mandated closure, and there was significant evidence that the closure was proving counter-productive to overall student welfare, then the SMA Leadership would explore all available options to allow for a resumption of our other “regular” and “hybrid” plans.

We will continue to pray that the Good Lord provides a long-term solution to the Covid-19 crisis, but in the meantime, the long-term welfare of our students, and the institutional survival of our school, may prompt us to place educational excellence and religious liberty ahead of short-term fear and uncertainty. We would also expect that, given the existing empirical evidence regarding Covid-19 and education, such a mandated closure should be short in duration, especially given the long-term welfare of our students, and the essential nature of our schools to allow parents to go out in the working world and earn a living for their families.

Online Learning Logistics

- Whenever conducting remote learning, SMA will employ Zoom “Live” classes as much as possible, in conjunction with our existing Renweb academic platform.
- Like regular classes, attendance will be taken, assignments issued, grades posted, feedback provided, and necessary remedial interventions conducted.
- Online faculty “Office Hours” will be scheduled weekly to ensure students can avail themselves of one-on-one teacher assistance.
- Routine communications and updates will be provided to parents regarding the on-going implementation and necessary modifications of any remote learning activities.
- Regular monitoring of family computer and connectivity resources will be conducted to ensure that remote learning can be disseminated effectively to all SMA families.



CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

A Note on Masks and Schools

A ubiquitous symbol of the Covid-era is the personal protective mask. Most states now require the wearing of a cloth mask when going to a store, attending large gatherings, and otherwise interacting in public with strangers. Many swear by its mitigating power, especially when worn and laundered correctly, and there is an emerging body of preliminary studies that have correlated increased mask use with a reduction of cases in states that have mandated it, as compared with states that have not. A smaller number of studies, mostly referencing the ineffectiveness of masks reducing other airborne respiratory diseases like influenza, question not only the ability of masks to stop the spread of viruses like Covid-19, but question whether such nationwide, uncontrolled experiments are even possible to conduct in the first place. That this is such a new phenomenon makes such research months or even years away from completion.

With all of that said, SMA will strive to achieve the Aristotelian “Golden Mean” regarding mask use, encapsulated by the mantra “Mask When Moving; Off While Learning.” We have adopted this balanced, common-sense approach as it is consistent with emerging best practices within a variety of societal settings, and seems to have been accepted by a critical mass of Americans as the right thing to do while we search for a viable Covid-19 vaccine. We are also buoyed by the emerging research on Covid-19 and schools, which indicates that educational environments, where children predominate and mix with older teachers, generate far fewer adverse effects from the Covid-19 virus than other institutional settings.

Our mask policy also reflects the essential mission requirements of our school. Public events and businesses attract customers who are there for a short period of time, avail themselves of a product or service, and then depart. A school, especially one with an educational and religious mission like SMA, is designed to build personal relationships between students and teachers so that each can grow greater in wisdom and closer to God. While it would seem simply an inconvenience that is well worth the trouble to wear a mask at a store for a brief moment to get what you need and help the economy can recover, forcing a teacher to wear a mask all day as they are explaining a finer point of Aristotelian ethics, Euclidian geometry, or Paul’s Letter to the Romans would actually make it quite difficult for them to do their job in a way that inspires. And the same goes for students who are trying to learn, have questions for their teacher, or who are engaged in Socratic discussions.

Americans have grown accustomed to the practice of going to and from a location in a mask, but then being allowed to unmask when able to spread out and perform a vital function. A hallmark of the “American Way” is compromise, and we believe that the SMA Mask Policy achieves such a spirit of compromise.



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We Are an Intentional Christian Community

The task of devising a plan that will allow SMA to re-open for live instruction in the age of Covid-19 makes one much more aware of the distinctiveness and character of the type of faith community we are building here. It also makes you realize just how difficult it is to disentangle oneself from the vagaries and competing dictates of the broader world. But as one considers the various trade-offs that exist when weighing the pros and cons of live instruction, you become overwhelmed with the realization that we must learn to trust and depend on each other to do the right thing if we are going to be allowed to benefit from the gifts of being together, sharing the wisdom of the ancients, and the joy of the Gospel. In other words, I think we all have to be “all in” this year if we are going to keep our school open, and that will no doubt require significant sacrifice and specific alterations of everyday habits by all of us.

Can it be done? Yes! Will it be difficult? You bet! Is it worth it? That depends if you really want to live for Christ. The early Christians, according to Acts, shared everything in common and inspired each other to go out into the world to spread the Gospel, particularly by showing the broader community how they loved and cared for each other. We have just such an opportunity this year at SMA, and we remain convinced as fear and anxiety grip other schools and institutions this fall, we have a tremendous opportunity to show our community a better and more joyful way to learn, live, and love. The first step is for all of us to get on the same sheet of music when it comes to how we do business this year. By putting our trust in God, Who made Heaven and Earth, there is no doubt we will be successful.

The Only Constant is Change

To say that the Covid-19 situation is fluid would be a remarkable understatement. But we at SMA have the benefit of consulting the wisdom of western civilization and the Truth of the Catholic Church, and that allows us to remain calm, cool, and collected in the eye of this storm. The world is constantly changing, but Truth never does, so the trick is to apply the Truth to the particular circumstances at hand. That is what Aquinas calls prudence, and that is what we need right now in our country. Our size and independence have been challenges in previous years, but this year, and moving forward, they are significant assets that provide the flexibility and nimbleness to adapt to the paradigm shifts that Covid-19 is precipitating in all aspects of our world: politics, economics, religion, culture, and yes, education. Bigger is suddenly not better, and smaller is increasingly beautiful, especially as denizens of the big cities empty out to less populated environs like Little Traverse Bay. The picture is still not clear, and uncertainty abounds, but if we exhibit quiet confidence in the merits of our approach, and stick together, the sky is the limit to our potential growth and positive impact for our Church and our World.



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Constant Communication Is Essential

Finally, it is imperative to observe that while a great deal of thought and deliberation went into the formulation of this reopening plan, it would be foolish to believe that we have all the answers or that new circumstances will not emerge, requiring adaptations and alterations to our plan. As this inevitably occurs, the leadership of SMA remains committed to sharing, collaborating, and communicating with our families so that we can benefit from the talent and insights of our most important stakeholders. We believe that we cannot thrive and survive without being open for live instruction, but we also know that we have to be smart about it so we can properly balance the requirements of our mission with the health and welfare of our community. With prayer, hard work, forbearance, and whole lot of soap and sanitizer, we know we can do it!

Although we live in uncertain times, I'm convinced that these times cry out for our beloved school and its mission more than ever before! We are about to embark on the best and most consequential year in the history of St. Michael Academy and I cannot wait to get started!

St. Michael, Pray for us!

Richard A. Brake, PhD.
Headmaster
St. Michael Academy