



March 11th, 2021

Dear Waterloo Catholic Community –

Today we sit on the one year anniversary of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic and tomorrow will mark one year since we were told we were going to have an extended March Break, that ultimately became our first lockdown. A great deal has happened since then and as a community it is my sincere hope that as you look back on this past year, there are some moments of hope and joy that you can identify. There can be absolutely no denying that the year has brought hardship and challenges to virtually everyone, but they have not been felt equally. Some of us will have suffered more than others, will have been impacted more than others, and some will have truly struggled to find the path forward.

My hope would be that as you reflect on this past year, you are able to pray an offering of gratitude for the family and friends who have helped you through and that your faith has been a constant source of consolation. I have prayed in gratitude for our staff who have been a rock of resilience, continually rising to the challenge to meet and serve the needs of our community and our students. I also pray in appreciation for the many parents and students who have journeyed with us and placed their faith in us, as we did our best to find the best path forward.

As mentioned – with today being the one year anniversary of the official start of the pandemic, I choose to hope and pray that today marks an official start to some return to normalcy. We know vaccine roll-out has begun and that by this coming fall things should look different – while perhaps not a full return to normal. We know for schools that our year will likely begin somewhat similar to this year but as the potential for vaccines for children also rolls out, by mid-year we may be in a reality, in our schools, that is closer to what we remember.

In education our planning for the 2021-2022 school year is underway now. We are working on staffing and budget, and need to make decisions for next year at this time. For this reason, next week – **March 15th through March 19th** – we will have a survey on our Board website for any parent/family that wishes to choose virtual learning again for next year. That said – it will be a one-time choice. That is, there will not be transition periods during the year. A choice for virtual will be a choice for September through June. Realizing that the landscape continues to change, we will confirm your choice with you in June (through one final survey open to all), but we will be seeking your interest now, so we can determine the demand for the virtual option. If you register for St Isidore, our virtual school, you will no longer be affiliated with your current home school, (for the 2021-2022 school year). You will have the option to re-register for the following school year (2022-2023).

We know that some students have found virtual to be a good way to learn. We do, in the main, feel that for a variety of reasons not only connected to academics, but to a young person's social



emotional well-being, that attending school in person is likely the preferred option for most students, when all things are equal. Please give this decision careful consideration. We will confirm with you again in June as mentioned, but we do need to know now if you believe this is an option you are seriously considering.

Once again, we encourage you to visit [Ontario.ca/covidresponse](https://www.ontario.ca/covidresponse) to learn what public health measures are in place in our community – but also please be aware that these could change depending on the most current public health advice. We also suggest checking out the WCDSB website <https://www.wcdsb.ca/living-learning-looking-forward/> and Region of Waterloo Public Health website <https://www.regionofwaterloo.ca/en/health-and-wellness/2019-novel-coronavirus.aspx> as they contain helpful resources and supports. If you have any questions about what your particular school is doing, please reach out to your local school principal.

I will continue to remind all community members that mental health resources are available to students and families through Kids Help Phone, which offers 24/7 counselling and referral services across the province. To use this free resource, children can call 1-800-668-6868, or text CONNECT to 686868.

If there are any further updates we will certainly share them as soon as possible. Please know that we continue to be in this together and day by day we will make it through. It has been a year unlike any other, but I hope that for you, like me, faith has been a source of comfort and hope. We are journeying now through Lent to the Easter Season. How fortunate are we to know the hope, promise and new life that is awaiting us, and how that will be reflected in the spring months ahead. Please reach out to us if you need help or guidance, and remain confident that we are here to support you, as we walk together as a hope-filled community. *#InThisTogether*

Sincerely,



Loretta Notten
Director of Education

