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To all Headteachers of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Southwark

21 August 2020

Dear Headteacher

I hope this letter finds you well and that you, and your staff, have managed a break over the summer after such a challenging year.

I want to offer my personal thanks to you, and all your staff, for your continued faithfulness to maintaining the life of your school during lockdown. I am especially grateful for the ways in which you have sustained the faith of your students and, particularly, for the work done by the Chaplains and Primary Leads. Catholic schools are centred on Christ and I appreciate greatly all that has taken place to keep Christ at the centre. Like so many of you, I was very moved by 'The Southwark UK Catholic School Blessing.'

As we approach the beginning of a new school year, new procedures and routines need to be established in all areas of school life, including the life of prayer and the celebration of the liturgy. As we know, the celebration of the Mass is foundational to our faith as Catholics. However, you will also be aware that, at present, Mass is being celebrated in parishes with particular restrictions and hygiene regulations in place. This is to reduce any possible spread of Covid 19. The temporary suspension of the obligation on Catholics to attend Mass on Sunday also remains in place because of the pandemic.

Following due consideration, it therefore seems prudent, for the time being, to continue the deferral of the celebration of Mass within schools, including school Masses usually held in a local Church. It is also not possible to hold any school celebrations of Word and Communion, where Holy Communion is distributed in a liturgy outside of the Mass.

These are provisional measure which will be reviewed on a half termly basis. I know you will appreciate how important it is that we do all we can to limit any spread of Covid 19. This said, we also want our staff and students to be able to attend Mass in school again as soon as possible.

In this interim time, I would like to encourage every school to explore other expressions of prayer and shared celebrations of our faith rooted in our Catholic faith and tradition. We continue to keep alive this year the theme of *'The God Who Speaks,'* so an emphasis on praying and understanding the Scriptures is especially relevant. We can also look to other prayers and devotions, such as guided meditation and praying with the rosary. In all of this, the relationship between each school and the local clergy remains vital. This should continue to be nurtured through collaboration to strengthen the faith-life of staff and students.

The Education Commission will be providing further support via Flame, a bi-weekly mail out, which will begin publication on Wednesday 2nd September. If you have any queries about this letter or would like to discuss its implications, please contact Sharon Docherty sharondocherty@rcaos.org.uk or Susan Elderfield susanelderfield@rcaos.org.uk at the Education Commission.

Thank you again for all that you have done, and all that you will do as a new academic years opens before us. Be sure of my prayers for you and your school community as we step forward to follow Christ in faith, hope, and love.

Yours sincerely in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a cross symbol and followed by a stylized, cursive name that appears to be 'John Wilson'. The signature is written on a white background.

The Most Reverend John Wilson,
Archbishop of Southwark