



## THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS

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Dear Parents,

As we now enter the second half of the first semester of the school year, there is a tremendous amount of good news on the Covid front. Covid cases have precipitously declined in Shelby County, and thankfully our Catholic schools continue to experience a very low infection rate. And, within weeks the Covid vaccination should be available for children ages 5-12, which will provide even further protection for our children in Catholic schools, for those of you that choose to vaccinate your children.

Many parents have expressed concerns about the ongoing mask mandate in our Catholic schools and would like for us to implement a mask-optional policy. Some parents have mentioned that Catholic schools in other parts of the State have implemented mask optional policies and they were wondering why we aren't following suit.

I am aware of the difficulties the masks have caused for some of our children. However, even though the Shelby County Health Department has lifted the mask mandate for most people in Shelby County, it has not done so for school children. Thus, currently, the Diocese is legally bound by a Shelby County Health Department directive to continue requiring our children to wear masks while in school. And, the United States District Court has enjoined Governor Lee from enforcing his Executive Order entered in August that would have granted our schools the right to enact mask-optional policies despite the Health Department's mandate.

While there are people with very strong views both for and against continued masking, as a Diocese we would like the opportunity to consider implementing a mask optional policy. Bishop Talley has asked our legal counsel to contact the Shelby County Health Department and inquire into potentially modifying the health directive so that going forward it would not be applicable to Catholic schools. Also, the Tennessee General Assembly is currently meeting in special session and considering proposed legislation that might alter the mask mandates in Shelby County.

But now, we are still bound to comply with the mask mandate along with all of the other public and private schools in Shelby County. Thus, even though we are open to considering and implementing a mask-optional policy when legally able to do so, at the current time that is simply not a lawful option. Parents that are concerned about the continuation of the mask mandate in our schools should therefore contact the Shelby County Health Department, and the Tennessee General Assembly and express their views.

We will update you as soon as there is any change in circumstances. Have a safe and very Happy Halloween!

*Mr. Pierre N. Antoine*  
Pierre N. Antoine  
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

cc: Most Reverend Bishop David P. Talley, M.S.W., J.C.D.  
Very Reverend Keith Stewart, Vicar General  
Pastors  
Dr. Colleen Butterick, Director of School Counseling Services  
Sandra Goldstein, Director, Office of Human Resources  
Rick Ouellette, Director, Office of Communications  
Margaret Scott, Executive Assistant to Bishop David P. Talley