



SAINT CATHERINE of SIENA SCHOOL

February 1, 2021

Dear Parent,

The week before February vacation last year, my husband surprised me with tickets to go to Rome for a few days over vacation. Vatican, here we come! Days later we were on a plane with a big ziplock bag filled with wipes, gloves and hand sanitizer. I am glad that I did not know what was to come and the heartbreak that would befall the world. Instead, during those few days, we were able to go to Mass at **Santa Maria sopra Minerva** in the quiet of a Rome winter night and visit Saint Catherine of Siena entombed in the High Altar. Our hearts were filled. (For our students who are learning about Fra Angelico, it was his feast day and his tomb is also in that church.)

I never could have imagined that a year later, so much has happened. I continue to be grateful that with God's grace, Saint Catherine of Siena School was able to be open for in person instruction - Day #86 today! Our days at SCS are now not only filled with prayer, joy, and learning but Covid mitigation protocols, as well. As you know, we wear masks all day except when eating and drinking, have all desks 6 feet apart, use gallons of hand sanitizer, and are buoyed by the research affirming lack of community spread in schools. In fact, like our Catholic School partners at 99 other schools here in Boston, none of our cases have come from SCS and instead from contacts during sporting practices & events, family & friends. In the last weeks, our school has unfortunately had a few more cases. As we have let our school community know about recent cases at SCS, a few parents have asked questions about our process to determine *close contacts*. We have had parents question whether our classrooms should stay open when a case presents. Here is some information that might help if you have those questions on your heart.

If an SCS student or staff member tests positive for Covid-19, Nurse Maiona and the Department of Health ask when the student or staff member presented with symptoms. Then, the Department of Health and SCS look back 48 hours. If the student or staff member was NOT at school 48 hours prior to presenting with symptoms, the Department of Health and so, SCS, determine that there are no close contacts because the student or staff member was not at school during their infectious period. Nevertheless, we let families and staff know that there is a case at SCS and additionally, if the case was in your child's classroom community. Then, if a family is concerned, they can call and speak with their physician, have their student tested, and/or stay at home and participate in remote learning. However, according to the Department of Health, it is not necessary. For example, if a person had a headache or malaise when getting up at 6am on Tuesday after a 3 day weekend and then, tests

positive for Covid-19, we would let families know that there is a case at our school in a particular class but the infectious period was not while our school is in session and so, there are no close contacts. Please know that we HAVE had close contacts in SCS cases, and had appropriate conversations with them, but have not overtly noted that in notification to families, for privacy reasons. Hopefully, we will not have any further cases of Covid-19 in the future at SCS but I will work to notify families and staff with different messaging in order to offer as much clarity during this time as possible.

Regardless, we will continue our mitigation protocols including having Mr Farrell fog each classroom space early each morning, have our Custodian Dave clean all high touch spaces in the school twice each day, wear masks, have students eat/ drink 6 feet apart, use an abundance of sanitizer and in doing so hope to keep our students and staff as safe as possible while we await the hope of the vaccine. Yes, we do regularly remind students to 'mask up' when they forget but overall, Mrs Noah and I are so proud of all 23 classrooms who have worked so hard in such a short time to be as safe as possible. Certainly, a year ago, while running around Rome in order to see as much as possible in such a short period of time, I never would have imagined how different SCS would be like this year. Nevertheless, I am so proud of our students and faculty for rising to the challenge and working as hard as they can to be as safe as possible while continuing to be filled with faith and learn as much as possible.

On our second day in Rome, we booked an early morning tour of the Vatican Museum. Before 6am, under a sky that was as black as pitch, we met our guide, Daniela, outside the museum. She led us into the museum and we met Gianni, who is the keeper of the huge rings of Vatican keys. Each time, he let one of us open a metal door or gate and then directed us to help turn the lights in the museum on. In the quiet of the morning, before the rest of Rome had woken up, we saw the Raphael tapestries hung in the Sistine Chapel where so many popes prayed. We were able to peek into private chapels and see amazing art all while imagining the Popes who once walked there. I asked if Gianni knew Saint John Paul the Great. I was touched by the way that he responded; describing in detail how incredibly kind Saint John Paul's eyes were when he would speak with Vatican workers all those years ago. Through Gianni's words, I imagine those kind eyes shining on us with grace as he intercedes on our behalf together with Saint Catherine of Siena in order to help us to navigate this unusual time. Saint John Paul said, **"There is no evil to be faced that Christ does not face with us. There is no enemy that Christ has not already conquered. There is no cross to bear that Christ has not already born for us, and does not now bear with us."** Thank you for your ongoing partnership and prayers. #Inthistogether

In Christ,

Beth

