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**Catholic schools, parish religious education programs,
comply with governor's order**

All Catholic schools in the Diocese of Erie will comply with Pennsylvania Governor Tom Wolf's order that all K-12 schools close for the next two weeks, beginning Monday, March 16.

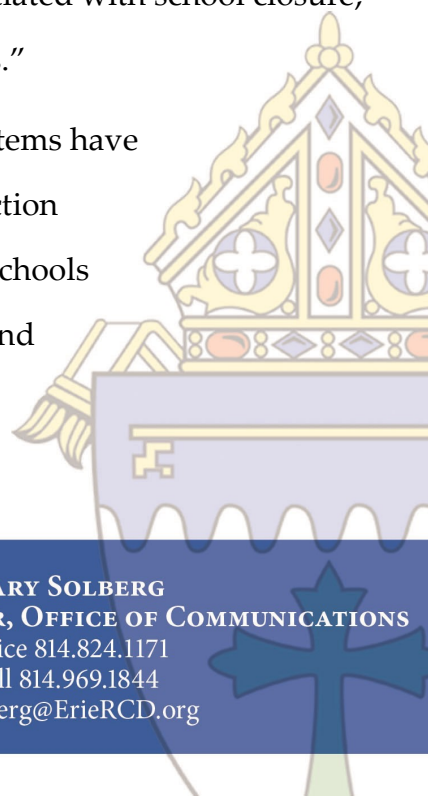
"I realize that Governor Wolf's announcement has raised a host of questions," Jim Gallagher, superintendent of schools for the Diocese of Erie, wrote in a brief statement to administrators. "I wish I could say I have all of the information, but I do not. Each school community will need to think through all of the implications associated with school closure; however, I am prepared to support you in navigating those details."

Gallagher acknowledged individual schools and school systems have different circumstances. Some may decide to continue with instruction "remotely," as they have been preparing for this moment. Other schools have extra time built into their calendars and may choose to suspend

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instruction for the duration of the two weeks.

The superintendent recommended that all Catholic school administrators take Monday and Tuesday to sort through the questions and issues that will be brought forth. Those choosing to go forward with remote instruction would then be able to proceed with that decision.

Per the Catholic Schools Office directive, all related activities must be cancelled when schools are closed for disease prevention.

Gallagher promised to remain in touch with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the Governor's Office and Catholic school administrators.

Many schools in the diocese have been actively exploring the possibility of offering remote learning instruction to their students whether or not this order was given. Details about those situations will be made available to the public as they are confirmed.

While Gallagher supports this decision by the governor, he acknowledged that it will have a significant impact on parents, families and staff.

"Truly, this is a difficult time for everyone," he said.

Faith formation leaders across the Diocese of Erie also were informed that they are to follow the governor's order and cancel all religious education classes and activities including retreats, live stations of the cross performances and other events, between March 15 and March 28. Bishop Lawrence Persico indicated he will defer to the decisions of local leaders about whether or not they wish to go forward with or postpone scheduled confirmation Masses. Parents and students will be free to use their good judgment about whether or not to participate. Provision will be made for those who choose not to participate so they can be confirmed at another time.

There are 32 Catholic schools located in the 13 counties of the Diocese of Erie, excluding universities. They serve 5,599 students. Another 6,900 students are enrolled in parish religious education programs.

In a separate statement, the St. Martin Center in Erie indicated the governor's order does not affect the agency.

"Both of our sites (the St. Martin Early Learning Center and its childcare program) will remain open," David Gonzalez, CEO, said. "Should the governor close childcare or early learning facilities, then we will proceed with the closing of our sites."

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