



OFFICE of the PRESIDENT

12 March 2020

Dear Members of the University of Mary Community,

As you know from previous communications, the university has been closely following events and public health recommendations surrounding the outbreak and spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19). The health of our students, faculty, and staff is a top priority at Mary. So is our educational mission. There has been an increasing sense of tension between these priorities as concern about the coronavirus has escalated over recent days.

The first case of COVID-19 in North Dakota was confirmed late last night. Even though it was diagnosed in a part of the state distant from our main campus and was contracted through out-of-state travel contact, this news obviously merits our attention and our careful, steady consideration.

As the final weeks of the spring term draw near, our current intention is to continue to offer in-person classes for our students and a rich experience of community on our campus through the end of the semester. Nevertheless, given all that we know and what we can anticipate based on information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), we need to proceed with an abundance of caution and provide, as best we can, for rapid changes in circumstances. We are taking into account a number of clear factors:

- 1) COVID-19 appears to pose the greatest risk to older adults and those with underlying and chronic health conditions. The CDC and the ND Department of Health has emphasized the need to avoid non-essential contact with elderly populations.
- 2) Although the health risks seem lower for younger, healthy adults when they contract the virus, they can still serve as carriers of the virus to more vulnerable individuals.
- 3) Large gatherings of persons in close quarters pose an increased risk.
- 4) Limiting exposure to oneself and others by limiting unnecessary movement, personal contact, and travel can mitigate risk.

With all of this in mind, I am able to share with you the following information:

- For the time being, our students are most welcome to remain on or commute to our campus for classes to finish out the semester. We will continue to monitor this developing situation, and we are providing clear instructions for such students so that their experience can be as safe as possible for themselves and others, with minimal disruption.

- Those students who believe that they would be safer somewhere other than our campus are free to make arrangements to that effect. These students should consult with each of their individual professors. They will be accommodated to the extent possible in completing their courses online through my.umary.edu (Canvas LMS). For any of the small number of courses that cannot be completed in this way for curricular reasons, completion of the course and the awarding of credit will be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Residential students on a meal plan who choose to depart campus will receive a partial credit in their student account at the beginning of their next enrolled semester. The credit will be calculated based on the remaining weeks in the semester minus an amount for fixed costs which are, by nature, irrecoverable by the university. For legal reasons, I am told that we are unable to issue refund checks in this amount, but it will decrease the costs of the next semester. An exception is those who are set to graduate next month, who will receive a check upon completion of their final course.
- Professors who, for any reason, believe themselves to be at greater risk are encouraged, at their discretion and in consultation with their Dean, to arrange to offer the remainder of their courses for this semester online. I would ask our students to be respectful and understanding of this personal decision.
- Administrative and support staff, along with those employees of university partners who serve on campus, should stay in close communication with their supervisors and use their best, prudent discretion. Anyone who considers themselves at greater risk should consult with HR to determine an appropriate plan.
- All classes and scheduled gatherings of more than 30 persons will be under review in an effort to find alternative arrangements, if possible. Those responsible for such classes or gatherings should write to the contact email at [www.umary.edu/covid](http://www.umary.edu/covid) ([healthinquiry@umary.edu](mailto:healthinquiry@umary.edu)) for direction. One of the great advantages of being a smaller place under these circumstances is that the number of such classes and gatherings is manageable. The Office of Academic Affairs will excuse student absences related to illness.

We cannot at this time anticipate all of the changes to the calendar through the end of the semester or to upcoming travel plans, but I am able to inform you of the following:

- The Rome Maymester has sadly been cancelled. Enrolled students should be in contact with the Office of Global Studies and with their academic advisor. Capacity will be expanded in the 2021 Maymester and even in each of next year's semester-long programs to accommodate, as possible, those who wish to reschedule this experience. Those unable to reschedule who also need the core course offered during the Maymester, *Benedict, Yesterday and Today*, should consult with their advisor as soon as possible to survey their options.
- All university-sponsored travel through the end of the semester is suspended, with exceptions made on a case-by-case basis. Athletic travel will proceed according to the guidelines of the NSIC/NCAA and with additional institutional precautions. All university-sponsored international travel is suspended through the end of May. International travel departing in June is now under review, with a decision forthcoming by April 1.

- The Vocations Jamboree next week, which is always a happy gathering with representatives of religious communities and service organizations from every corner of the nation converging on our campus, can no longer prudently be held. We had considered cancelling the Expo and proceeding with the keynote presentation, but that would involve a large gathering of students in the MAC, joined by many guests from surrounding communities.
- All campus Masses are being moved to Our Lady of the Annunciation Chapel, allowing participants more space between each other. The Lenten season has meant that Our Lady of the Word and Benet have been overflowing, with too many people in close quarters. For this same reason, through the end of the semester, we will be adding a 9:00 am Mass on Sundays and a 4:30 pm Mass on Wednesdays. The Sign of Peace and the distribution of the Precious Blood have been suspended, and priests are greeting people after Mass without the shaking of hands. If you're experiencing any cold or flu-like symptoms, your university chaplain has asked that you please do not come to Mass.
- The Corporate Faculty and Staff Meeting on March 16 is being cancelled, with the intended content of that meeting conveyed by email next week.
- The upcoming Spring Theater production, *Pirates of Penzance*, slated for March 20-22, has been cancelled, as has the upcoming Spring Choir and Band Concert on Sunday, April 5. Additionally, the Office of Student Development will be considering whether to continue or cancel other student activities on a case-by-case basis.
- The Leadership Awards Banquet on March 31 will now be a simple ceremony, held in Founders Hall, live-streamed for family and friends who would have wanted to attend.
- The 2020 President's Club dinners, scheduled for next month, are being cancelled for the safety of our donors and friends.
- The last day of the term will be April 17. Final exams will be held online or before that date at faculty discretion.
- A decision about Commencement 2020 and surrounding activities will be made by April 1. For now, this culminating event in the university's life remains on our calendar as scheduled.

The University of Mary remains open. University housing, computer labs, food service, the health clinic, university ministry, counseling services, and all other aspects of the university's main campus remain open. The university's COVID-19 webpage, [www.umary.edu/covid](http://www.umary.edu/covid), will continue to be our primary source of information and updates related to university operations.

I would earnestly ask those remaining on campus and continuing to attend classes in-person to observe very carefully all of the recommendations of the CDC websites and the ND Department of Health. Those links are available at [www.umary.edu/covid](http://www.umary.edu/covid). I would also offer the following guidance:

- Please reconsider any out-of-state or any unnecessary travel until the end of the semester. This includes Easter travel. We are planning a full range of services on campus for the Sacred Triduum and will schedule a special Chapel of the Word for Easter. Special meals are also

being planned so we can share fellowship together while reducing the risk of transmission of the virus to or from campus. If you do travel between now and the end of the semester, please inform your Resident Director and keep a careful record of those you come into contact with while you are away.

- Observe additional sanitation protocols in heavy-use settings (the Crow's Nest, fitness center, Welder Library, etc.). We will try to make abundant hand sanitizer products available in such spaces. This is also a good time for us to give each other a little extra personal space, modeling some of that stoicism of North Dakota's German-Russian and Scandinavian heritage.
- Please refrain from visiting Annunciation Monastery through the end of the semester. You can bet that the Sisters are praying for us, and their hospitality is unfailing. **This is not a request that comes from them but from me**, as an expression of extra love and care for our Sisters, some of whom would be at high risk were they to contract the virus.
- If you are receiving Holy Communion at Mass, please be very mindful as you are receiving. We use large hosts and try to be careful, but it is helpful when those receiving by the tongue are very still, avoiding quick movements, and when those receiving by the hand hold their hands high and flat, not cupping them. If you have any concerns about contracting or transmitting something through the receiving of Communion, consider making a Spiritual Communion.

The spread of the coronavirus may necessitate changes in the way we interact, but it does not change what we do. The University of Mary will continue to operate and will continue to provide the highest-quality education possible to our students, and University of Mary employees will continue to serve those who have been entrusted to us.

This is a new and difficult challenge not only for our community at Mary, but for the broader community in Bismarck-Mandan, North Dakota, our country, and our world. We will continue to closely monitor the COVID-19 situation with local, state and federal public health officials. And we remain united in prayer for protection, and for healing for those who are already affected.

In the meantime, please carry on with your work and your studies. Do so with care for yourself and for those around you and continue to adhere to all the recommended preventative measures. But do not retreat from your commitment to your education and to the important work you do every day.

In Mary,



Monsignor James P. Shea  
President