April 13, 2020

Dear Families, Faculty and Staff,

Welcome back. While I am mindful that the unprecedented crisis in our city is affecting each of us in different ways, and that the past week has been a traumatic one for many of those in our community, I truly hope that everyone was able to find some moments of respite. Today we returned, gathering and learning again in our virtual spaces, ready to move forward into the next several weeks of distance learning at Saint Ann’s.

At this time, guidance from public officials as to the rest of the school year remains uncertain and even contradictory. As an independent school, we were able to make the decision to close our doors five days before public schools did, and we are not legally obligated to abide by the mayor’s announcement that NYC public schools will be closed for the rest of the year. However, I do take the mayor’s decision quite seriously as an indication that public health concerns may not allow us to reopen our doors at all this spring. That said, it seems premature to announce a final decision about the rest of our school year until there is more clarity from the State of New York. The current Executive Order from Governor Cuomo mandates school closure through April 29, and I am hoping for further guidance from the state and from public health officials about May and June as that date draws closer.

I know how frustrating uncertainty on this matter is for all of us. I assure you I will be in touch as soon as I have made a final decision. In the event that we do not resume in-person classes this spring, we would also announce the cancellation of our summer program at that time. I will share information about how and when essential items can be retrieved from school buildings if we do not return to campus.

For the next several weeks, we anticipate using the same scheduling framework that was in place before the break. Division heads will continue to be in touch regularly regarding any modifications. We have continued to enhance the security measures in place for those teachers at Saint Ann’s using Zoom. We have ensured that all teachers are using the settings recommended by cybersecurity experts, including “waiting room,” password-protected meetings, host-only screen-sharing, disabling file transfer, and muting all participants upon entry. We continue to monitor the technology landscape to make sure that all of our classes are as secure as possible.

Over this past week I tried to lift my eyes away from the hourly newsfeed to consider the deeper meaning of this moment that we are in together and to ask what role Saint Ann’s is playing in this crisis. Seventy years ago, when William Faulkner accepted the Nobel Prize for Literature, he spoke of immortality at the dawn of the nuclear age. Humanity stakes a claim to immortality, he said, not because we have an inexhaustible voice but because we have “a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance.” He said that in these dark
hours “the poet’s voice need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help
him endure and prevail.” That is the task at hand for us as we help the children we raise and the children we
teach to look forward with hope, to see in the countless acts of compassion, courage and sacrifice around us
the enduring foundation for the future they will inherit.

Love,

Vince