

Sept. 9, 2020

Dear Friends,

### **Testing**

The big news is that we had three positive COVID-19 tests last week. While that puts our positivity rate at only 0.16%, it still makes the point: We must remain vigilant against the novel coronavirus. The three W's remain important—Wear your mask, Wash your hands, Watch your distance. All the time. That's hard to do. I forgot to don my mask last week when I walked out of my office. I made it almost all the way to Dean Papillon's office before I realized what I had done! I immediately went back and got my mask, but the point is, it's easy to forget. A little reminder can go a long way.

This week we are testing all students again. Each student has a regularly scheduled test day, assigned alphabetically by last name, and the test site is open from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. so that it's easy to work around class schedules. We will also continue to test some employees based on risk factors such as working directly with students or commuting for work.

What happens when we have a student test positive? Most students choose to return home to isolate for at least 14 days. This gives their family the comfort of being able to monitor the student's health. Students are able to participate in their classes from home. If they are unable to return home for isolation, or choose not to, they isolate at St. Mary's and participate in their classes remotely.

We have arranged to use St. Mary's for student isolation and quarantine, with the Sewanee Inn as a backup location. Quarantine is used to keep someone who might have been exposed to COVID-19 away from others until they know they are not infected. Isolation is used to separate someone with a confirmed positive case of COVID-19 (both those who are sick with COVID-19 and those with no symptoms) from people who are not infected. Meals are delivered, and quarantined and isolated students receive support for online learning until they are medically cleared to re-engage. Sick students receive medical care via telemedicine or in person from the health care professionals in our University Wellness Center. Our close partnership with Southern Tennessee Regional Health System will help us manage any severe health challenges.

### **Contact Tracing**

As you might expect, there have been several questions about contact tracing this week. Whenever a positive test result is received, University staff collaborate with the Tennessee Department of Health to conduct contact tracing and notify any close contacts of a positive test. We have also contracted with a firm in Chattanooga to assist with our student contact tracing efforts. If you have not been notified, then you are not considered to have increased risk because of exposure to an individual who tested positive.

A close contact includes:

- Anyone who was within six feet of you for longer than 15 minutes without a mask.
- Anyone in direct contact with secretions from a person with COVID-19 (e.g., being sneezed or coughed on, kissing, sharing utensils, etc.).
- Anyone who traveled with you in a vehicle unmasked.
- Anyone who lives in your residence and shares a common room, a shared restroom, or a shared kitchen on your floor.

Being in the same in-person class, or teaching an in-person class, with someone who tests positive does not automatically make you a close contact. In fact, we have been very careful about how classes are set up in order to avoid a situation where an entire class would need to quarantine if a student tests positive. However, students, like the rest of us, often maintain a group of friends across activities or contexts (classes, Greek life, housing, etc.). Students within the same class may share an exposure, but it does not necessarily follow that the exposure occurred *within* the classroom.

### **Thank You**

I've decided that there are *so* many people, divisions, offices, and areas to thank that I will dedicate some space in every communication this semester to mention a group or two and outline some of the things they have been working on. There is danger in doing this, I know. I'm likely to leave someone out who really deserves mention. And yet I think it is important that everyone across campus understands what others are contributing to our efforts, even if that work is not immediately visible.

**Facilities Management** was well aware of the importance of bringing students back to campus. For the most part, FM staff were not away from campus during the spring and summer. They worked to ready spaces with extra cleaning and deployed sanitation supplies to all classrooms. They ordered tents, and supplied power, whiteboards, fans, and furniture as needs continued to change. The team worked thoughtfully with the registrar, the dean's office, and LITS to arrange socially distanced classrooms, change air filters and schedule maximum ventilation of interior spaces, and coordinate infrastructure upgrades to help add technology to classrooms. Testing areas were prepared for on-boarding and then were moved to other locations. FM continues to support these efforts daily.

During all of this, Marty Hawkins and Naomi Pelagi scheduled and supervised moves of several departments to six new locations on campus. The Sets and Events team pitched in to help professional movers amidst changing schedules and expectations. Along with so many of us, the entire FM team has adapted to seemingly constant changes throughout the summer to prepare for the arrival of students. This is what they do best!

**School of Theology:** Reopening the School of Theology required the effort, patience, and good humor of all of the staff and faculty. Sandra Brock and Ben King reorganized classrooms, verified ventilation levels, and measured distances between seats. Sarah Limbaugh scheduled each space so that only the proper number of people would show up at any one time. To fill (but

not overfill) those classrooms, Walker Adams and Connie Patton finished recruiting and funding the largest entering class in several years, while Deborah Jackson and Charline Butner moved orientation online and arranged physically distanced move-ins. To support faculty colleagues, Ben King met with each faculty member to develop a plan for “hybrid/flexible” teaching, course by course. Through it all, Mary Ann Patterson made sure that communications to students and colleagues were frequent and clear. Meanwhile, Education for Ministry, an important part of the School’s mission, had to change its operations to #ProtectTheBubble and ensure the safety of participants. Karen Meridith and her team (Donna Layne, Deborah Russell, Elsa Bakkum, Cindy Hargis, Dawn Baker, Bobbie Ashley, and Joshua Booher) transitioned fall in-person EfM trainings to online sessions, while simultaneously implementing an entirely new registration system, which I hear is a bit like juggling while pedaling a unicycle.

### **From My Perspective**

We had the gowning ceremony in the Quad on Friday. It was another wonderful event, much like the installation of the new University chaplain. This ceremony is usually held in All Saints’ Chapel with its magnificence and grandeur, with honorary degrees, and families in attendance. Obviously, this year’s ceremony was unlike any other gowning that has ever happened in Sewanee, just as the Honor Code signing was unlike any other—held on the football field in a light rain. The same is true of the installation of our new University chaplain, as I mentioned last week.

These changes have made me reflect on our traditions. We have changed so many things, it sometimes feels like we are tossing traditions out the window left and right. We could feel these as great losses. But the situation has forced us to identify the essence of our traditions. To strip them down, to determine what is really important about each one, and to rethink the trappings that have grown up around them over time. I understand that our pomp and circumstance, while magnificent to some (including me), can be stifling to others. The changes in the gowning were not only related to COVID-19 requirements. The readings were from the Hebrew tradition and the Quran. I applaud these changes for, I hope, making this tradition more accessible to those it is for—our students.

Sincerely,

Nancy Berner

Provost