



OFFICE OF THE VICE-CHANCELLOR AND PRESIDENT

May 27, 2020

Dear Returning Students and Families:

This is typically a very peaceful time on campus, coming as it does after the senior class has been celebrated and graduated, and before most summer programs begin. This year, of course, is anything but typical. We were able to confer degrees on the Class of 2020, albeit virtually and with the promise of an in-person Commencement ceremony next May. With our congratulations and warmest wishes, they have now joined the ranks of proud Sewanee alumni.

The campus itself is quiet now as most University staff continue to work remotely—but several teams are planning, with some intensity, for the year ahead. For those team members and the staff who support them, now is not the time to relax and catch our breath. No doubt you have questions about the fall semester. While I cannot yet offer answers to all of these, I hope to give you a sense of what we are doing now so that Sewanee is positioned to provide the best educational experience possible, no matter the circumstances.

We continue to make plans for holding the fall semester on campus. Course registration and room draw have been completed. Several capital projects—including the new Wellness Commons on campus and the new University Bookstore in the Sewanee village—are finishing up and will be ready when the new year begins. We have reason to be cautiously optimistic: The state of Tennessee continues to be a national leader in COVID-19 testing, surpassing the federal testing criteria for a safe reopening. The number of cases in Franklin County has remained low (7 active cases as of May 24); more than 2,000 county residents have tested negative.

A sense of community is at the heart of a Sewanee education, and while in some ways this spring's forced separation has drawn us closer, our fervent hope is that we will reunite on campus soon. Bringing students safely back to campus is in the best interest of our entire community.

As we plan a return to in-person instruction in the fall, we are also necessarily paying attention to making sure our campus and local community remain healthy and safe. Our routines may have to vary, even considerably, from those of a normal Sewanee fall. Resuming business as usual, without taking recommended precautions to comply with public health guidance, would potentially put students, faculty, staff, and others in our community and beyond at undue risk. So we are preparing for the possibility, perhaps even the probability, that life on campus this fall will be different.

The Sewanee Fall Operational Group (Sewanee FOG, of course!) began its work last month. Seven teams are planning, in their specific areas, for how we might operate in the fall: College Academic Planning; Environmental Health and Safety; Student Support/Student Life; Student Activities; Information Technology; Undergraduate Recruitment; and School of Theology Academic Planning.

A safe reopening, and a safe semester, will, in all likelihood, require a regimen of screening, testing, tracing, masking, and social distancing. We may have to modify our dining operations and perhaps also our class schedule and even our fall calendar. Enhanced cleaning of campus spaces will need to occur regularly. These adjustments, which will be temporary, should allow us to carry out our work safely and successfully. Virtually every other campus in the country will have similar practices in place. There is some comfort, at least, in knowing we are not alone. As we put specific measures in place, we will keep you fully informed so that you, too, may plan.

As we navigate the planning process through constantly evolving circumstances, I want to extend my thanks to all of you for your patience, engagement, and understanding during this difficult time. I have every confidence in my colleagues, who continue to work very hard to prepare for the year ahead, and who understand the uniqueness of this place, this beautiful Domain, which we call home.

Sincerely,

John M. McCardell, Jr.
Vice-Chancellor and President