



Catholic schools reopen across diocese

By Karen Bonar
The Register

HANOVER — The first day of school on Aug. 19 looked a little different this year at St. John's Catholic School.

Instead of parents walking their students to the classroom and taking traditional first day of school photos, families waited for their turn for temperature checks and screening questions prior to entering the building.

"We have a station set up at the front door," said principal Amanda Cook. "A nurse has volunteered to come in and will do a temp check and ask COVID questions and sanitize their hands."

Once children from one family unit are screened, they were permitted to enter the building.

"They will go directly to their classrooms, they won't be permitted to congregate," Cook said.

The school has 97 students in grades first through eighth. The plan is to stagger arrival time, so



Courtesy photo

Students line up at intervals outside of St. John's Catholic School in Hanover on Aug. 19 to await temperature checks on the first day of school.

not many will be milling about in front of the school. Additionally, Cook said there will be a monitor on each floor to ensure students go directly to their classrooms.

As in schools across the state and country, adjustments are being made to help minimize risk or exposure relating to COVID-19. With fewer than 100 students in the building, Cook said the challenges aren't as steep as other schools are facing.

"For the most part, I

think we can work without dividers," she said.

According to the Kansas Department of Health and Environment's website, as of Aug. 19, Washington County, where Hanover is located, only had two positive COVID-19 cases, compared to the counties that surround it with double-digit cases.

There will, however, be changes for the school year. In addition to temperature checks, screening questions and hand sanitizing, stu-

dents will be required to wear masks.

"We asked them to have two masks and a container to keep them in," Cook said. "I have allowed them to choose the mask they will wear. I think if they pick something they like, they are more likely to be willing to wear it."

Additionally, students will eat lunch in the classroom and water fountains have been turned off.

Cook, who is entering her second year as principal in

Hanover, spent 20 years teaching third grade before transitioning into administration. She said with a low COVID-19 count in the county, the hope is to return to school in a safe manner.

"Our parents and community has been very supportive," she said of the school's efforts to prepare for the year. "Most of our families have the mindset of 'Let's follow the rules, wear the mask and get back to school.'"

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Sister Pauline retires after 57 years in Catholic education

By Karen Bonar
The Register



Photo by Karen Bonar / The Register

Sister Pauline Kukula, a Sister of St. Joseph of Concordia, taught at Sacred Heart Junior High School for 33 years. She retired at the end of the 2019-20 school year.

SALINA — The first day of school is one Sister Pauline Kukula, CSJ, looks forward to every year.

"If you like to fall in love and you want to fall in love, brand new, over and over again, year after year, be a teacher," she said. "When it was August, I say, 'It's time to fall in love again!'"

"After 50 years, I would still get excited," she added with a laugh as she talked about the first day of school.

Except, this year will be different. An August with heartbreak.

Sister Pauline, who was a

teacher for 57 years, retired in May.

Her retirement marks the end of an era for Catholic education in the diocese. For more than 120 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia have taught at Catholic schools within the diocese. Sister Pauline was the only religious sister employed as a teacher for the 2019-20 school year. With her retirement, there are no more religious sisters teaching at Catholic schools.

"She's a role model. Not only for students, but for staff," said principal John Krajicek, "She taught how to lead prayer services for kids and teachers. As we would lead prayer services,

we would take our cues from sister."

ON AN OVERCAST Tuesday, 81-year-old Sister Pauline walked up the sidewalk at Sacred Heart Jr.-Sr. High School wearing a 100-watt smile, and delivered one of her signature lines: "We've got to be the sunshine in each other's lives today," she said cheerfully.

It's a line her students often hear on any dreary day.

She spent 33 of her 57 years in education within the walls of Sacred Heart Jr.-Sr. High School.

"She's legendary around

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Transplant

Father Mike Leiker received a new liver, which was donated by a member of the Salina Diocese, on May 22.

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Census concludes

Self-reporting count will end Sept. 30.

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Men's Conference

Annual conference adjusts, proceeds with social distance.

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Schools creating individual plans for their building, families

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GEOFF ANDREWS, Superintendent of Catholic schools for the Salina Diocese, gathered with principals and pastors for the annual principals' meeting on Aug. 3-4 to discuss the upcoming school year.

"Each individual school has their own plan for moving forward with hope as we return to school," he said. "I like that we're giving them some flexibility to do what works for their school."

The theme, "Moving forward with hope," is taken from the National Catholic Educator's Association theme for this year.

"Our plans are a combination of NCEA's 'Forward with Hope' and KSDE's 'Navigating Change,'" he said. "When we return to school, our Catholic identity is front and center."

The annual principals' meeting was an opportunity to exchange ideas and strategies for those leading the Catholic schools.

"It's opened up really good dialogue," Andrews said. "I hope it can continue with all of our education. We



Michelle Selzer takes Shayden Selzer's temperature on the first day of school, Aug. 19, at St. Joseph Grade School in Oakley.

came together because of a pandemic, but how do we keep these relationships to move our schools forward?"

ANDREWS SAID HE IS coordinating with all of the schools, but the diocese is not creating the plans.

"We're letting the build-

ing leaders and pastors make those decisions about when to open," he said.

With more than 26,000 square miles in the Salina Diocese, Andrews said it's essential to understand that re-opening will likely look different in each location.

"Our leaders are trying to

make the best decision with the most current information that they have at that time," he said. "We've learned that tomorrow, we might hear something different and we'll have to pivot our plans."

As of Aug. 24, all Catholic schools were scheduled to open in August. This includes all students in the classroom for five days a week, with appropriate social distancing measures, mask wearing, temperature taking and hand washing.

"All are opening a little later than originally planned, but it gives us time to get all of the precautions in place," Andrews said.

Part of the preparation includes a digital aspect to education.

"One thing that I think is important that all of our schools continue to use the online learning," Andrews said. "Let's get students familiar with the platform in the classroom, and that way, if we do have to go remote, we're not thrown into it. It's used in the classroom, and the teachers and kids will be more familiar

with it."

Communication is key as the school year continues.

"We expect our leaders to develop trust with teachers and students and parents — to be present and visible and to over-communicate," Andrews said. "We want them to make sure they are getting the message out multiple times."

If health concerns arise during the school year, he said the Catholic schools will take a similar tack to the public schools.

"If or when something happens, we'll contact local health department and take their advice and do what we need to do at that time," Andrews said. "After spending a day and a half with our principals and pastors, I know we're in really good hands. I have also physically visited all of our Catholic schools this month."

"Our leaders are excited to get the kids back in the building. The teachers are ready to get back in the building. We all know everyone is ready to be back to some type of normal, and school provides that routine, especially for the kids."

Sister witnessed changes in education over the decades

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here," Krajicek said.

He has been at the school for two dozen years, and said no other teacher has been physically in the building for that length of time.

"She's transcended generations," Krajicek said. "She's taught kids and their fathers and grandfathers."

This was possible because when she moved to Salina in 1970, Sister Pauline taught for 13 years at St. Mary Grade School (first and fourth grades). She then moved to the junior high school in 1986.

"She was animated in front of the classroom and made it come alive, no matter what age group," Krajicek said. "Even though she was in her 80s, she could connect with the junior high kids. She knew where they were at, what their struggles were. She emphasized the human dignity in every student."

A NATIVE OF CLAFLIN, she entered the Sisters of St. Joseph of Concordia in 1957 at age 18. Her teaching career began in 1960 in Chicago.

"In 1960, we would have as many as 48 first graders my first year of teaching," she said. "You could have 60 because the expectations and structure were there."

She recalled a fellow teacher, Sister Joseph, had 60 seventh grade students one year in Chicago.

In the more rural areas of Kansas, however, she said it was common for one sister

"I think she's the ultimate master teacher. She loved her faith and loved her kids and brought her faith alive for her kids."

John Krajicek
Principal

to run a classroom for grades one through four, and another taught grades five through eight.

As the years past, educational theories continued to grow and change.

"You began to be aware of methods and individual needs," Sister Pauline said. "You became more aware of students who could learn quickly and others who needed resources or needed more hands-on learning."

The ability to identify a student's needs and connect with them individually is a strength she exemplified.

"I think she's the ultimate master teacher. She was born to teach," Krajicek said. "She had a love of faith, a love of her students and this talent to teach. You have all of these ingredients ... it was the perfect combination for a master teacher. She loved her faith and loved her kids and brought her faith alive for her kids."

Sister Pauline broke into a rap of the books of the New Testament to explain her theory for teaching.

"I was always strong with song and rhythm," she said.



Sister Pauline Kukula teaches a junior high class in a January 2009 file photo. She was a Catholic educator for 57 years.

"I do a lot with multi-sensory learning. If you're going to learn the 27 books of the New Testament, make it into a song. If I teach precepts of the Church, I teach a number code with them. It's not just the brain. You see it and learn it and engage it. I think it's a very strong way to learn."

ORIGINALLY, SISTER Pauline said she resisted teaching the younger grades.

"When I first started teaching, I didn't want to teach first grade," she said. "I wanted to be a high school drama teacher. My heart turned to stone."

"One day, a little kid came in and couldn't get his hood off. I was trying to get this little knot out, and I thought, 'I'm this close to someone so fresh from God.' It was an awareness of the value of every person and their reflection of God's presence to you. It's the spirituality I see in the pri-

mary grades."

In nearly 60 years of teaching, Sister Pauline said she has taught every grade from first through tenth, except for the third and sixth grades.

She has grown and adapted as she worked her ways through the grades.

"I've loved junior high," she said. "In junior high, they're finding their growth. Out of chaos, God brings goodness and order."

Krajicek said Sister Pauline takes an interest in the total student.

"She encompasses the mission of Catholic education — the academic and spiritual, but also the social component," he said. "Even in February, she was sponsoring junior high dances. She would organize and plan them. She would be there supervising. Kids would have a blast. She'd be there setting up and there until the dance was over cleaning up."

A Sister of St. Joseph of

Concordia for 62 years, Sister Pauline said retiring from her vocation of teaching is difficult.

"I tell the students, 'I just love to be here with you kids. There's no place I'd rather be than with you in this classroom,'" she said.

Over the span of her career, Sister Pauline has taught in Chicago, Iowa, Great Bend, Beloit and Salina. She has no firm plans for retirement, rather to "slide into" it and enjoy a few hobbies.

"I did find as I aged, I wish I had the spunk I had in my 50s and 60s," she said.

Krajicek described Sister Pauline's dedication to teaching as a blessing.

"Sister had a love of faith — she epitomized a Catholic educator," he said. "Whenever that student was on their spectrum of faith development, she was willing to meet them where they were at. When you teach with love like that, it transcends. She has impacted so much of our alumni. They would come back to meet with her and invite her to attend their weddings and baptisms of their babies."

Krajicek said he will miss sister's spirit in the upcoming 2020-21 school year.

"You can't replace sister," he said. "I was just thankful for every year we had her. She's a role model — not only for students but for staff. She would work with them and teach with love. You could see God's work through her teaching."