

SPECIAL BULLETIN FROM THE PRESIDENT TO FRANCISCAN UNIVERSITY STAFF

04/03/2020

Peace and Blessings!

I am writing to provide an update on how we are dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on Franciscan University and how we plan to deal with it in the future. Please take a few minutes to read this update so we can all be on the same page.

First, at the moment, there is no change in our benefits, compensation, and staffing levels, and the University will continue to pay everyone regardless of their level of engagement. We will re-evaluate this decision on an ongoing basis in light of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Again, our hope is to maintain compensation, benefits, and staffing at their current levels throughout this crisis, if possible. Should things change, we will communicate this in a timely manner.

Having said that, Franciscan is preparing for a negative impact on enrollment this fall. I am also certain COVID-19 will negatively impact our summer conferences with the possibility that some will be cancelled. Obviously, both of these situations will have an unfortunate impact on our finances.

Our leadership team has begun looking for the best ways to offset these possible losses and equip ourselves to move forward with our mission. We are working to understand and respond to these challenges—which I also see as opportunities—over the near term (next three months) and long term (next year to three years) and will continue to share information transparently and invite ongoing collaboration.

We've collaborated with the faculty, for example, in the decision to move forward with implementing online undergraduate degrees in theology and philosophy starting this fall—a decision that will help us gain new students and retain those who may not feel comfortable returning in the fall.

We particularly want to broaden our reach through initiatives like these and other efforts to introduce more potential students to Franciscan University. Every member of our University family can help with that by introducing your friends, families, and social media connections to our mission: Share our latest promotional videos and talk about your own or your children's experiences with our educational mission.

You can also help us as we seek God about other possible ways the University can continue and expand our mission:

- 1) Pray a Memorare each day, asking Our Lady to intercede for Franciscan University and all those negatively affected by the pandemic.
- 2) Ask God's creative Spirit to lead us in our deliberations—that we will see, think, and move in creative, fresh, new ways as a University. A glimpse of the springtime flowering throughout the Ohio Valley shows us just how creative the Holy Spirit is—and how creative we can be in addressing today's challenges if we follow his guidance.
- 3) Send me your Holy Spirit inspired ideas. Our Franciscan University community consists of talented, gifted, wise, and prayerful faculty, staff, and friars, and if you have new ideas to share, please email me at president@franciscan.edu.

Living with uncertainty is unsettling for us all. But it is also an invitation to a deeper trust in the Lord—a trust that has been called forth throughout our 74-year history. We are here today because friars, faculty, and staff responded with great trust as they served our students through periods of insecurity, turmoil, and instability. Now, it is our turn to walk on water with our eyes fixed on Jesus.

Already, I have seen so many of us walking on water, for which I am so grateful. Our professors, even those who have never taught online before, have adapted their courses and manner of connecting with students so they can complete the semester from afar. Our friars provide spiritual nourishment through confessions and livestreamed Masses and videos. And everyone who can do so is working remotely or on campus as necessary.

I am grateful for all these efforts and more, and we want to continue to find ways to maximize our engagement as a University. To this end, Human Resources is developing a process that helps departments identify areas of unmet need that can be filled by employees who are not being fully utilized. Many employees, for example, are helping out by proctoring tests for our students since the company that normally provides that service cannot do so.

Supervisors and departments should review their designation of essential roles in case work demands and priorities have changed over the last couple of weeks. Also, supervisors and employees should consider whether more flexible times or staggered shifts could allow more people to work on campus without compromising social distancing.

A reminder: Those who do work on campus must continue to take their temperature before coming to campus or visit the Wellness Center nurse in the lobby of Ss. Cosmas and Damian Science Hall if you would like assistance (weekdays, 8:15 a.m.- 10:00 a.m.). As always, for the sake of your colleagues and yourself, please be sure to observe social distancing at work.

None of us knows the future, but of this I am certain: Jesus will lead us through this storm, as he did our predecessors at Franciscan University, no matter how wildly the winds and seas rage. As St. James encourages us, let us encourage one another: "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces

perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

Know that you are in my thoughts and prayers—and especially that the friars and I offer Mass for you daily. I ask your prayers for us—and for all those you serve with and those you serve.

God’s peace,
Father Dave

Father Dave Pivonka, TOR
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