News



St. Rita Catholic Church and School community and Ursuline Academy of Dallas, which are in the Diocese of Dallas, are seen in this composite photo. Church and school officials announced March 11, 2020, their campuses would be closed due to the coronavirus pandemic. (CNS / The Texas Catholic/David Sedeno)

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Dallas — March 13, 2020

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Two Dallas Catholic school campuses and a parish have closed after a person showing symptoms of COVID-19 had come into contact with individuals at those school and church communities, school and Diocese of Dallas officials said March 11.

Officials at St. Rita Parish and School community and the Ursuline Academy of Dallas announced early in the day their campuses would be closed. Later the same day,

officials at Jesuit College Preparatory School of Dallas and Cistercian Preparatory School in Irving also announced that they would be closed for the remainder of the week.

All of the schools have spring break scheduled for the week of March 16-20.

Fr. Joshua J. Whitfield, the pastoral administrator at St. Rita Parish, sent a letter to parish and school families early Wednesday, telling them that after they were informed by an individual that the school and church officials had contacted the Dallas County Health and Human Services Department and their City Council member Jennifer Staubach Gates, also a member of the St. Rita Parish.

That individual was being tested and receiving care March 11, the diocese said in a statement.

"At this time, they've asked us not to comment further on the details of this particular case," Whitfield said in his letter, referring to county health officials.

Ursuline Academy of Dallas, the all-girls private Catholic high school, posted on its Facebook page that "a member of our extended school community is presumed positive for COVID-19."

"Out of abundance of caution, Ursuline Academy of Dallas will be closed today and the school will undergo a thorough cleaning," the statement read. No other details were available.

Dallas Bishop Edward J. Burns commended the actions taken by school and church officials.

"We believe that dealing proactively with the issue of COVID-19 was the appropriate thing to do under these circumstances as it is our goal to attend to the physical and spiritual welfare of our parishioners," the bishop said.

Whitfield said the St. Rita parish and school community had taken immediate measures to address the situation on their campus.

All weekday Masses and confessions are canceled for the remainder of the week. Masses are scheduled to resume at 5:30 p.m. March 14.

All meetings on the campus have been canceled until further notice.

The school is out for spring break the week of March 16-20 and school administrators will address the future academic schedule during that time.

The entire parish and school campus is being cleaned following guidelines from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

"We are taking these measures voluntarily out of a great abundance of caution and out of concern for all our members, as well as the wider community," Whitfield said. "So, let's be calm and let's be St. Rita to one another! Let's hold each other in prayer. And wash hands!"

Jesuit school president Mike Earsing said in a letter to parents of the all-boys private Catholic school that the school would move to an eLearning protocol for the remainder of the week.

"As we prepare for the return from spring break, we will continue to follow all recommendations from the CDC and state health officials as it relates to cleaning protocols and travel advisories," Earsing said.

He said parents are free to keep their sons "home if you ever have concerns regarding their health" and he asked that if a student or relative shows symptoms to visit a health care professional.

"This is a very challenging time and I am grateful for how we are responding as a community," Earsing said.

At the Cistercian school, also an all-boys private Catholic school, officials announced on its website that "in an abundance of caution" the classes and extra-curricular activities for the remainder of the week would be canceled.

"We will monitor the situation throughout spring break as it continues to evolve and ask you to anticipate follow-up communication from the school regarding post-spring break resumption of classes," the school said.

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