Greetings to all of our students, parents, faculty, staff, and other Xavier family members.

I know these are extremely difficult days for all of us. They have been hard for me, too. Many of you have been asking a single question continuously for the past few months:

What’s Xavier’s plan for the next school year?

We haven’t been withholding information. We just didn’t have it. Now, finally, I think we do. Our plan tries—to the best of our ability—to take into account the health and safety of all of the Xavier community. And it’s also an attempt to secure Xavier’s future.

The board of trustees and I, including many other people, have been actively engaged over the past few months—but especially the last few weeks—assembling a plan to ensure Xavier’s viability for next year and years to come.

I’ve had a lengthy opportunity to think about Xavier’s future since we were last together as a community on March 13th. As those of you who were in the chapel that day will recall, after I finished reading my letter announcing the end of the school year, I took questions from whomever had them.

One student raised his hand and asked, “Father, what is the future of Xavier High School?” Now, keep in mind this bright young man asked that about a minute after realizing the school year was over.

I responded without the slightest doubt: “I think it’s bright!”

I’m grateful to say that, with God’s grace and the work of many people, I stand by that statement today: Xavier’s future is bright.

As our students can tell you, I pick a theme—a little phrase—for each school year. This year will be no different, even if the theme will be announced a bit early. The 2020-2021 theme is this: Realistic and optimistic.

Realistically, we are unable to have the kind of school year to which we’ve all become accustomed. There are three reasons for this: 1) The Chuuk State quarantine requirements, 2) the FSM border closure, and 3) the United Airlines schedule.
After consultation with the board of trustees, it’s Xavier’s decision that, until further notice, school days at Xavier are to be limited to students who...live within the Chuuk lagoon, require no quarantine, and require no sponsor families. The dorm will not open, and all students will be required to commute. Xavier will provide limited transportation.

We’ll try our best to comply with Chuuk’s mandates for mitigation strategies, as well.

Now, I know all of this raises further questions and concerns, which I promise will be addressed.

One of my primary concerns is for the Class of 2021. Xavier wants nothing more than for each member of the Class of 2021 to graduate, and do so on time. Provided a senior successfully completes the 2020-2021 school year at Xavier or elsewhere, Xavier is willing to review his or her transcript for eligibility for a Xavier diploma. We will have to make these decisions on a case-by-case basis. I encourage all members of the Class of 2021 to reach out to me directly for more information and for help.

When I was talking to my mother about what I should say regarding our plan, she said, “Just don’t blame people. All of what’s happening is no one’s fault, really.” She repeated it: “Don’t blame people.”

She’s right. What’s happening to Xavier right now is not anyone’s fault. It would be easy to blame people, but that’s not going to get us anywhere. But blame solves very little—if anything at all. Even worse, blame is backward-focused. Besides being unchristian, blame won’t help us think about our future.

As any good Xavier student will tell you, now is about the point at an assembly when students want to know what’s next.

Well, here’s our plan, and it’s an optimistic one.

- As already stated, Xavier’s campus on Mabuchi Hill will open only for eligible Chuukese students of both genders who live within the lagoon. The exact rhythm of the days has yet to be determined. The dorm will remain closed, and a simple lunch will be provided. We will follow Chuuk State’s mandates for public spaces.

- That leaves the majority of our community—students from islands outside of Chuuk. We are asking each Friends of Xavier organization—FOX groups—in each island district to identify people to lead what we’re labelling “Xavier satellite tutorials.”
• Xavier is prepared to send Xavier-level curriculum and guidelines to tutors in each island group, provided we know there is someone there to oversee the program. That is not to say Xavier can supervise everyone. We can’t. But we want to collaborate, especially with FOX groups.

• What these satellites will look like will probably be different from one island to the next. It may be a mix of local Catholic high school attendance or other local schooling with in-person tutoring sessions supplementing that learning. Or some other concoction that we haven’t yet considered.

• Admittedly, the satellite tutorial notion is new to all FOX groups and it will take time and effort to gain clarity around the idea. While Xavier has its own perspective, we’re stressing the need to be flexible and work with each island group to find out what the needs and possibilities are. Since this is the first time those groups are hearing of it themselves, please be patient as we all figure out what this will look like for each location.

The success of this endeavor--of these grass-roots, Xavier tutorials outside of regular campus life--will, ultimately, be determined by three things:

1) God’s grace.

2) Enthusiasm for Xavier’s mission.

3) The commitment to see this project succeed. Commitment is so central. Islanders--especially Xavier alumni--in each place have to be committed to this cause. If there is no collective efficacy in a particular island group, that island group will be in danger of falling too far behind. It’s that simple. If you are a member of a FOX group and living on your home island, now is your opportunity to show everyone how much Xavier has meant to you, and how much Xavier means to Micronesia. You need not be an alumnus or alumna to get involved, either. Without commitment from FOX groups, these satellites will not succeed. That’s just being realistic. And yet, because there are so many bright Navigators in Micronesia, we remain optimistic this can work.

We’ve dedicated a special portion of our website to all of this. It’s www.xaviermicronesia.org/covid19. There you’ll find links to our plan in greater detail, as well as a very important question section. It will be updated as the situation unfolds. Knowing, however, that there will be questions we couldn’t anticipate, please email us at covid19@xaviermicronesia.org. I promise we’ll get back to you within 48 hours (but please take time zones into account).
I give special thanks to our board of trustees, as they were incredible contributors to all of these ambitious ideas. Because of their love for Xavier, they worked diligently with me to come up with a way of proceeding that we all feel is both realistic and optimistic.

Kembo Mida, Jr (our chair)
Tom Benz, S.J. (The Superior of the Jesuits of Micronesia)
Martin Carl (our Principal)
Dr. Juan Flores (Superintendent of Guam Catholic Schools)
Milañ Loeak (Class of 2006 from the Marshall Islands)
Michael Wiencek (Principal of Yap Catholic High School)

We were also served by several other important non-board members whose advice has been invaluable:
Joan Carl (our school nurse)
Rod Jacob, Esq. H’19 (former board chair and an honorary member of the Class of 2019)
Fr. Joe Parkes, S.J. (The Jesuit assistant for Secondary Education)
Fr. Michael Rozier, S.J. (Assistant Professor of Health Management and Policy at Saint Louis University)

Finally, I’ll share a story I think might help us think about where we are at the moment. Several years ago, I was visiting Yap. A close Jesuit friend of mine and were treated to a ride on a traditional outrigger sailing canoe, piloted by some old school Yapese navigators. It was awesome. While it was a perfect Micronesian evening, at one point, a strong wind picked up, and the sail collapsed. The masts, made of mangrove wood of course, went flying and banged loudly all over the canoe. The sail covered us, and I couldn’t see the sky. And we were far from shore--or at least it felt like we were to me. I admit I was scared--at least a little. The canoemen told my brother Jesuit and me to be calm. While it was definitely an unforeseen emergency, they assured us we’d be ok. Before long, they had the wooden masts back on both ends of the canoe, the sail was raised, and we were cruising along the blue Pacific again.

For a while, the sail on the Xavier canoe has been down, and it’s been hard to see where we’re going. We’re working really hard to get the masts back in place and the sail back up...so we can continue on our journey again. Please know we’re truly trying our best, and we’re optimistic about the waters ahead, no matter how rough they may be.

Please know of my prayers for all of you.

Saint Francis Xavier, pray for us.