

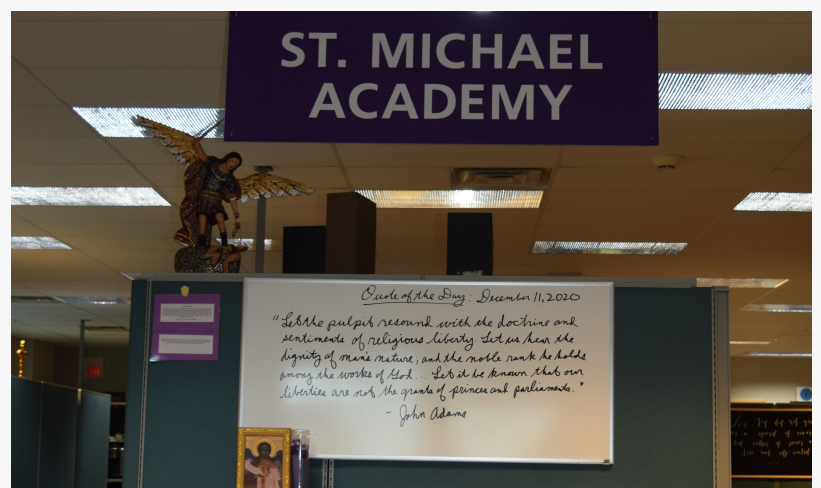
Renowned Epidemiologist Aids St. Michael Academy's Challenge of Michigan Lockdown as Thomas More Law Center Files Suit

St. Michael Academy, a private Catholic HS is challenging MDHHS order to shut down in-person instruction on the bogus claim it is "following the science."

ANN ARBOR, MI, US, December 14, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- St. Michael Academy, a small private independent Catholic high school located in Petoskey, Michigan has a total of 30 high school students. St. Michael is challenging Michigan's current MDHHS order which has shut down in-person instruction at high schools across the state on the bogus claim that it is "following the science." Citing to the recent Roman Catholic Diocese opinion by the U.S. Supreme Court that observes, "even in a pandemic the Constitution cannot be put away and forgotten," the Thomas More Law Center ("TMLC"), a nonprofit public interest law firm based in Ann Arbor, Michigan, filed a lawsuit on behalf of St. Michael late Friday in the federal district court for the Western District of Michigan.

In an astonishing turn of events, St. Michael was able to enlist the support of a world-renowned epidemiologist and expert on the spread of COVID-19,

Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya, a Professor of Medicine at Stanford University. Dr. Bhattacharya is an



author of 136 articles in peer-reviewed journals and has provided testimony relating to COVID-19 to both federal and state governmental bodies. He is assisting St. Michael Academy without charge, as is the Law Center.

Dr. Bhattacharya has already filed an affidavit in the case. He points out that MDHHS's orders shutting down schools to in-person instruction are inconsistent with the best scientific evidence regarding the safety of students and the guidelines provided by the World Health Organization. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergies and Infectious Diseases, supports the WHO guidelines.

Moreover, Dr. Bhattacharya, citing to July guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control, warns that prohibiting in-person instruction potentially causes tremendous damage to students, including: severe learning loss, widening disparities in educational outcomes, hampered development of social and emotional skills, potential harm to mental health, exposure to heightened risk of maltreatment and abuse at home, nutritional deprivation of poor children, and a sharp reduction in regular physical activity.

Dr. Richard A. Brake, the Headmaster of St. Michael Academy, is not only in charge of the academic and spiritual development of St. Michael students, but also of the development and implementation of the Academy's plans to keep its students safe from the COVID-19 virus. He and his staff kept up in-person instruction this school year, until the November 15, 2020 shutdown order was issued by the state. Thus far, St. Michael has not experienced any cases of COVID-19 among its students, faculty, or staff.

Dr. Brake believes that banning in-person instruction precludes the Academy from exercising its religious freedom to inculcate in its students the sense of awe and wonder about all of God's creation, encouraging them to look beyond the temporal and mundane towards the eternal and transcendent. Education and formation at St. Michael Academy involve prayer, worship, devotional practices and the Socratic method. These are not effective when done remotely, with students looking at computer screens.

Richard Thompson, TMLC's President, observed, "No one denies that slowing the COVID 19 pandemic is a compelling state interest. But the U.S. Supreme Court's November 25, 2020 decision in Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn v Cuomo held that, even so, where a state's COVID-19 mitigation law burdens religious exercise and is not neutral, as in our case, states must narrowly tailor their edicts to meet the state interest in the least restrictive manner. The State of Michigan cannot suspend a fundamental right of the people to the free exercise of religion protected by the First Amendment."

Thompson added, "And based on the scientific evidence that very few children under the age of 19 suffer or die as a result of COVID-19 infection, and rarely transmit the virus to other children or adults, weighed against all the negative ramifications of keeping children home, the state cannot meet the 'strict scrutiny' test which demands that it address its interests by the least

restrictive means. Experts like the CDC Director are now saying that one of the safest places for students during this pandemic is in school.”

[Read the St. Michael complaint here](#)

Read Dr. Bhattacharya's 20-page Affidavit here

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