

# Flu forces high school seminary to hold graduation behind closed doors

MOUNT CALVARY, Wis. – High school graduation is a long-awaited day for seniors, a time when they're warned about tripping across the stage as they receive their diplomas in front of family and friends.

This year, two confirmed cases of H1N1 virus, which causes swine flu, and more than 50 students with flulike symptoms led administrators to make St. Lawrence Seminary High School's graduation private, with no family or friends allowed.

Originally scheduled for May 17, the graduation was held May 15.

As of May 22, Wisconsin had 787 confirmed cases of the swine flu, more than any other state. Illinois was second, with 707 confirmed cases. However, public health officials in Wisconsin said other states may have more cases but more testing was being done in their state.

At St. Lawrence, Timothy Guiden, director of marketing, public and alumni relations, said that closing the graduation to friends and families was probably the biggest change in the seminary's tradition. Eight of the 46 graduates were international students and another 28 were from out of state.

"I would say that the families we've talked to are very, very understanding of it," Guiden said, describing the reactions of families traveling from Korea, Mali, Singapore, Saudi Arabia and various states.

"If you can imagine, four years of these guys living together, and a place like this has many, many traditions, and it's very heartbreaking to have to change some of these 150-year traditions for seniors," he said in a phone interview with the Catholic Herald, Milwaukee's archdiocesan newspaper.

The school filmed the May 15 ceremony, sent the seniors home with DVDs before

they left the next morning, and scrambled to have a live video stream of it on the Web, which Guiden said was clear enough for viewers to read the slide show that was presented during the graduation.

According to a press release from the seminary, state officials notified the Fond du Lac Health Department May 13 that a student and a staff member in residence on campus were confirmed with H1N1. St. Lawrence Seminary officials met with the health department May 14 to decide what steps to take for the remainder of the school year.

The seminary did not close school for the final days of classes, which ended May 20.

Revised guidelines from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention do not require schools to close as they did during the initial stages of the outbreak because everyone on the St. Lawrence campus was potentially exposed to the flu, but changes were made specific to the events surrounding graduation.

Diane Cappozzo, health officer of Fond du Lac County, said that because St. Lawrence Seminary is a boarding school preventing other students residing within the campus from becoming ill is hard, but it is also simpler to keep outsiders H1N1-free.

In the nearby Diocese of Green Bay, at St. Norbert College in De Pere, four students had contracted the flu but commencement ceremonies there went on as planned May 17.

Mary Osling-Sisay, dean of students and vice president of student affairs, said school officials made the decision based on the school's emergency response plans as well as CDC guidelines and De Pere Health Department guidelines.

During finals week, the college activated its emergency plans which include daily updates on its Web site, extended hours at the campus Health and Wellness Services, and extra cleaning – beyond CDC recommendations – in public areas.

Osling-Sisay said that, along with formal information channels, her department's staff met with directors of residence halls and they in turn spoke to student leaders. They took "care of one another," she told The Compass, Green Bay's diocesan

newspaper.

The dean said all those efforts “helped a lot to dispel misinformation that was out there” and people were reassured that the school had a plan.