



September 24, 2020

My Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Diocese of Savannah,

I would like to thank you for your thoughts and prayers this week upon my Ordination and Installation as the Fifteenth Bishop of Savannah. As I settle in to my new responsibilities I write to you today to provide you with an update on how we as a Diocese are moving forward in the midst of the pandemic.

While the number of new COVID-19 cases in Georgia has declined by more than 50% since the beginning of August – from a seven-day moving average of 3,551 on August 1 to 1,724 on September 20 – we remain cautious and concerned for the health of everyone. Therefore, I am extending the Dispensation from the Obligation to Attend Sunday Mass through the end of the liturgical year, the Solemnity of Christ the King which is celebrated on November 22, 2020.

I would like to thank our parishes for their extra efforts to ensure the safety of our faithful while also providing daily activities during these past months. Since reopening at the beginning of June, we have had no COVID-19 outbreaks traced specifically to any of our parishes. I commend our Pastors for their leadership in providing healthy places to worship and I urge everyone to remain vigilant as we continue this journey together. I would also like to thank those who have returned to in-person worship for following the guidelines and protocols put into place by your Pastor. In my short time here I am impressed with the beautiful care that I have witness in loving God and neighbor.

I ask you to join with me in continuing to pray for all of those who have been stricken by this pandemic, and for the caregivers, public health officials, and civic leaders persevering in service to the common good. We pray for those who long to return to Mass and to the Sacraments but are unable due to age or health issues. May their longing be rewarded by Almighty God with an outpouring of grace and hope. For those who are able, I encourage you to return to Mass when you are ready and comfortable. Your parish family needs you and misses you.

To those who are reluctant or unable to come to Mass or parish events, I ask you to continue to nurture your faith! Watching a live-streamed Mass is only part of the equation. Perhaps you could also deepen your relationship with our Blessed Mother by praying a daily rosary or visiting your parish church to pray privately during the day when few are present. Would you consider participating in a formative program or Bible studies at [www.formed.org](http://www.formed.org) and [www.ascensionpress.com](http://www.ascensionpress.com)? Even if we stay home, our spiritual lives and our relationship with Jesus Christ and the Church must be tended to.

As we have since the beginning of the pandemic, we ask our Mother Mary to watch over and intercede for us so that we may be healthy in soul and body. Our Lady of Perpetual Help, pray for us! Please know that I make a commit to lift you, your loved ones and your intentions in my prayers daily. I appreciate your prayers for me and for all in the Diocese of Savannah. May we meet each day in our prayers and Rejoice in the Lord always!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Stephen D. Parkes, D.D.  
Bishop of Savannah

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