



DIOCESE OF ST. PETERSBURG
Office of the Bishop

July 17, 2020

Dear Pastors, Priests, Educators, Catholic School Parents, and Guardians,

As you are aware, the rates of Covid-19 infection have recently risen significantly both locally and nationally. In light of this development, I wanted to share with you an update on the planned beginning of the academic year for Catholic Schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg. As your bishop, I am very concerned about the health and well-being of our school children, our dedicated teachers and school staff, and our families. I have been praying about next steps and consulting with many sources including our Office of Catholic Schools and Centers, our Diocesan Covid-19 Task Force on Catholic Education, pastors, educators, physicians, parents, and emergency management officials.

I want to affirm our commitment to return to in-person instruction in our Catholic Schools which is vitally important for the healthy development and wellbeing of our children. At the same time, we must always act with prudence. **Therefore, I am postponing the opening day of parish and diocesan K-12 Catholic schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg for two weeks, from August 10th to August 24th.** This will give our educators additional time to prepare for the safe return of our children. It will also give us the opportunity to continue monitoring the rates of infection in the five counties we serve. I realize this will require changes to our academic year, so I have instructed the Office of Catholic Schools and Centers to create a new general school calendar and work with each school on making necessary local adjustments.

I urge you to remain strong in the faith and stay close to Christ in prayer. You have been and continue to be in my prayers during this difficult time. Please pray for me, that I may be the leader you deserve, and that God has called me to be. May God bless you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Gregory Parkes
Bishop of St. Petersburg