



DIOCESE OF SAINT PETERSBURG  
Office of the Bishop

October 2, 2024

*"Our help is in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth" (Psalm 124:8).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

All of us are heartbroken by the scenes of destruction in our communities. Even worse, lives have been lost from the effects of Hurricane Helene. The days that followed revealed shocking images of streets, homes, and churches flooded throughout the Diocese of Saint Petersburg. If you have suffered a loss, I am sorry, and you are in my prayers.

Longtime residents say they have never experienced this type of flooding. In the Diocese of Saint Petersburg, the communities most affected are situated along the Gulf Coast, Tampa Bay, and our rivers. You have probably seen the images of damage and destruction, but what you may not have seen are the homes of our priests and religious sisters that have been flooded. These humble servants are striving to minister to their communities while also seeking temporary shelter. The street in front of my Saint Petersburg home was flooded and utilities were shut off for a time. Fortunately, I found temporary shelter at the Nazareth House, a summer home for seminarians, and I was joined by priests whose rectories were flooded out.

So far, we have determined that 12 of our Catholic schools and Early Childhood Centers have sustained damage to their buildings or properties. Two are significant. Eighteen Catholic churches or their properties have been damaged by wind or water. Pinellas Hope and Tampa Hope, our Catholic Charities homeless shelters, have experienced damage, flooding, and power outages. Their residents are still displaced. Some of our Catholic Charities affordable housing units were also flooded. The reports are still coming in and we continue to assess the damage.

So many of our brothers and sisters in Christ have lost everything. While we pick up the pieces of the broken lives in our midst, we also turn to our Lord and trust in Him. We are alive and have much to be grateful for: the many blessings that he continues to bestow upon us. We thank God for the gift of life and the gift of a new day to love and serve one another. We are grateful for those parish teams who had minimal damage and are now stepping forward to help lead cleanup events in their neighborhoods, or opening their doors to serve as shelters, to provide comfort to those who are grieving.

If you feel led to share a blessing with others, I invite you to give to our Diocesan Disaster Relief Fund. Since 2017, the fund has provided nearly \$2 million for disaster recovery efforts. Now we will help our local communities in need. Please visit [www.dosp.org](http://www.dosp.org) to make a donation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

*+Gregory Parkes*

Most Reverend Gregory Parkes  
Bishop of Saint Petersburg