

Common Decree Issued by the Archdiocese of Atlanta and Diocese of Savannah Related to Weapons
Approved by Archbishop Wilton D. Gregory and Bishop Gregory J. Hartmayer

I. Summary of Decree

It is the decree of the Archdiocese of Atlanta (the “Archdiocese”) and the Diocese of Savannah (the “Diocese”) that no firearm or knife with a blade longer than five inches will be permitted on any property owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese. This prohibition applies to any church, administrative facility, school or other facility owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese. Except as otherwise set forth in this Decree, no person shall be given the authority to vary or change this Decree.

II. Scope

This Decree applies to all clergy, members of religious orders, employees, private contractors, volunteers or other individuals acting on behalf of the Church, parishioners, vendors, and all visitors on property owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese. This Decree applies on any church or school property owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese, and includes any activity sponsored by the Church that occurs on non-traditional church or school property, such as conferences, parish or school trips, and other similar activities. This Decree applies regardless of whether a person possesses a license to carry a weapon, or whether that person is unlicensed.

III. Purpose

The purpose of this Decree is to update and clarify the Archdiocese’s and Diocese’s position in response to changes in Georgia state laws that became effective on July 1, 2014, and to provide guidance related to the possession of weapons on property owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese. The Church respects and supports the Second Amendment to the United States Constitution and recognizes the right to lawfully possess a weapon for personal protection, hunting or other sports. However, this Decree is rooted in the belief that our churches and other places of worship are intended to be sanctuaries—holy sites where people come to pray and to worship God. In this nation of ours, they have seldom been the locations where violence has disrupted the otherwise peaceful atmosphere. Should it be necessary, we will seek the assistance of trained law enforcement personnel for protection, but among ourselves we will first seek ways of peace and reconciliation.

This Decree is intended to balance the rights of all who approach our churches and schools with the greatest possible protection for children, the elderly and the otherwise vulnerable people of our society. It is intended to clarify the Archdiocese’s and Diocese’s position as to current Georgia law governing the possession of firearms and other dangerous weapons, such as the Safe Carry Protection Act of 2014, but is in no way meant to limit the ability of any church or school to enact additional restrictions as they deem necessary under the circumstances. Any church,

school or other facility may enact stricter restrictions, such as banning additional types of weapons, that may be appropriate under their unique circumstances.

IV. Weapons Decree

The Archdiocese or Diocese controls and owns private property, sponsors ministries and other activities, and has previously prohibited the possession of a weapon in churches, schools and other facilities to the fullest extent permitted by law. It is the intent to continue to exclude or prohibit the possession of any weapon in a facility owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese, except as specifically permitted by this Decree.

A. Prohibitions and Enforcement

Except in those cases where the law authorizes possession of a weapon by specified individuals (such as municipal, state, or federal law enforcement officers, or authorized security personnel), or in such other situations provided in this Decree, no person may possess a weapon in any facility owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese.

For purposes of this Decree, a weapon is:

- any pistol, revolver or other handgun;
- any shotgun, rifle, or other long gun; and
- any offensive or defensive knife or cutting instrument with a blade that is greater than five inches in length.

For purposes of this Decree, a facility is:

- any cathedral, church, parish building, rectory, associated parking facility, or similar facility that is owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese;
- any healthcare facility, aged care facility, social welfare facility, or associated parking facility that is owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or the Diocese;
- any campus, school, sports facility, administrative facility, retreat facility, associated parking facility, or similar building or facility that is owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or the Diocese;
- any bus or other transportation owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese;
- any chancery, administrative offices, associated parking facility, or similar location associated with a school or church, that is owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese; and
- any other location where an activity or function sponsored by the Archdiocese or Diocese is being conducted, such as conferences, parish or school trips, and other similar activities.

Any clergy or employee who is unlawfully carrying or storing a weapon in violation of this Decree may be subject to disciplinary action, and will be peaceably asked to remove the weapon from the facility and return only when they have removed the weapon.

For purposes of this Decree, the term clergy means bishops, priests or deacons, and members of any religious orders serving the Archdiocese or the Diocese.

For purposes of this Decree, the term employee means any employee, volunteer or other person working, volunteering, or acting on behalf of the Archdiocese or Diocese, who is not a member of the clergy.

Any non-employee who is unlawfully carrying or storing a weapon in violation of this Decree will be peaceably asked to leave the facility and return only when they have removed the weapon from the facility. Persons who fail to comply with requests to leave a facility will be treated as trespassers until they come into compliance.

For purposes of this Decree, a non-employee means anyone that is not clergy or an employee, and includes parishioners, visitors, guests, vendors or other persons who enter a facility owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or Diocese.

Clergy, employees or other persons acting on behalf of the Archdiocese or Diocese should never provoke confrontations that could lead to violence, and should contact law enforcement authorities when necessary for the protection of persons and property and in furtherance of this Decree.

B. Exceptions

This Decree is subject to the following exceptions:

1. This Decree does not preclude the possession or use of ceremonial swords by Knights of Columbus, Knights of St. Peter Claver, Equestrian Knights of the Holy Sepulchre or similar organizations authorized by the pastor of the church or head of the religious institution where the swords will be possessed or carried.

2. This Decree does not preclude the possession of a weapon by municipal, state, or federal law enforcement officers, campus police officers, authorized personnel responsible for the security of persons and property, or other persons that may be authorized by state or federal law to possess a weapon at a facility.

3. This Decree does not preclude the possession of a weapon by participants in authorized sporting events, firearms training courses or training programs, or possession of any non-functional weapon used by marching bands or similar school groups.

4. This Decree does not prohibit clergy from lawfully possessing a weapon and securely maintaining them in residential space owned, leased or operated by the Archdiocese or the Diocese.

5. The Archbishop of Atlanta, or the Bishop of the Diocese of Savannah, or their respective vicars general at their request, for their respective Diocese, may grant an exception to this Decree when necessary for the protection of persons or property under their authority.

6. This Decree does not preclude the possession of a weapon by any person who holds a Georgia Weapons Carry License, and who is either in, or travelling to or from, a parking area associated with any facility, so long as the weapon is under the person's control or is contained in a secured or locked compartment in their vehicle. This exception is strictly limited to those individuals holding a valid Georgia Weapons Carry License that comply with Georgia law governing the possession of weapons in these circumstances, and in no event shall these individuals be permitted to deviate from the limited exception permitted under Georgia law. *NOTE - REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SOMEONE HOLDS A WEAPONS CARRY LICENSE, A PERSON THAT DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR ONE OF THE FIRST FIVE EXCEPTIONS IS NEVER PERMITTED TO POSSESS A FIREARM OR OTHER WEAPON IN A CHURCH OR A SCHOOL UNDER EITHER GEORGIA LAW OR THIS POLICY.*

7. This Decree does not preclude the possession of a Weapon by any person who holds a Georgia Weapons Carry License when picking up, or dropping off, a student or other person at any facility, so long as the weapon is under the person's control or is contained in a secured or locked compartment in their vehicle in accordance with Georgia law. This exception is strictly limited to those individuals holding a valid Georgia Weapons Carry License that comply with Georgia law governing the possession of weapons in these circumstances, and in no event shall these individuals be permitted to deviate from the limited exception permitted under Georgia law. *NOTE - REGARDLESS OF WHETHER SOMEONE HOLDS A WEAPONS CARRY LICENSE, A PERSON THAT DOES NOT QUALIFY FOR ONE OF THE FIRST FIVE EXCEPTIONS IS NEVER PERMITTED TO POSSESS A FIREARM OR OTHER WEAPON IN A CHURCH OR A SCHOOL UNDER EITHER GEORGIA LAW OR THIS POLICY.*

Effective: July 1, 2014

Approved:



Wilton D. Gregory, S.L.D.
Archbishop of Atlanta



Gregory J. Hartmayer, O.F.M. Conv.
Bishop of Savannah