



# FISK

## UNIVERSITY

*Provost Office*

October 23, 2020

Dear Students, Faculty, Staff and Alumni:

It goes without saying that the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on all institutions of higher education, including Fisk University. Yet, Fisk University is among a small group of colleges and universities, particularly historically black colleges and universities, that have fared relatively well during this crisis. After initially postponing major celebratory events, such as our spring Commencement exercises, we scheduled events for later in the fall when we believed COVID-19 would be more sufficiently controlled. When the decision was made to hold commencement at the end of the semester, estimates put forth by medical experts indicated that the rates of infection would decline in the fall of 2020. However, recent evidence revealed that this has not happened.

While COVID-19 infections within the Fisk University community have remained extremely low, the pandemic continues to surge throughout Nashville, Davidson County, and the state of Tennessee. In fact, Tennessee now ranks number six nationally for new cases of COVID. On October 21<sup>st</sup>, several area hospitals issued a joint statement asking Middle Tennessee residents to help keep those facilities free from being overwhelmed. According to other media reports, the availability of hospital beds in Nashville has dropped to only 5 percent of their normal capacity. The Tennessee Health Department reported that the number of people admitted for hospital care statewide has risen 45 percent since October 1. Davidson County's COVID-19 case and death rates are second only to Shelby County in Tennessee. Perhaps due to this fact only a handful of prospective graduates indicated a desire to participate in the proposed program. With these things in mind, Fisk University has made the decision not to hold an in-person Commencement event scheduled for November 14<sup>th</sup>. Instead, Fisk will hold a virtual event that will be streamed on that date. More information is forthcoming with respect to how and which platform to log on and share in the "Fisk University Virtual '20 Graduation Celebration."

We sincerely apologize to our graduates, invited guests, alumni and friends for any inconvenience this change has caused. Be assured that we thought it best to err on the side of caution, prevention, and our commitment to the safety of the Fisk family. If you have questions or concerns about this change, you may contact the offices of Academic Affairs or Student Affairs. We also invite you to monitor the University Website, your Fisk University email, and social media for information about our upcoming virtual celebration event. Fisk Forever!

Sincerely,

**KENNETH E. JONES, DMin, PHD**

Interim Provost/Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs