Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

My heart is filled with great joy in this season of Advent and the coming celebration of the birth of our Lord. Soon we will acclaim the arrival of 2019 and I will be excited to mark my 10th anniversary as bishop of this wonderful example of Christ’s faith and good works — the Diocese of Knoxville.

While we have much to look forward to in 2019, I want to also express my thanks and gratitude for the wonderful generosity and tremendous support you have given to our diocese in 2018. Thanks to you, the Catholic Church in East Tennessee continues to grow. We have made significant strides this past year, but we must maintain our spirit and zeal as a mission diocese established by Saint John Paul II in 1988.

Looking back at 2018, in the year in which we celebrated our 30th anniversary, we certainly didn’t start slowly. In March, we dedicated the new Cathedral of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Twenty-one, 16 bishops, 150 priests, 32 deacons, and 3,700 women and religious partook in the three-hour dedication Mass, along with more than 10,000 East Tennessee Catholics. The dedication of our new cathedral made news around the world and we continue to receive new visitors — both Catholic and non-Catholic, eager to witness the beauty of this symbol of faith. Thanks to you, the new cathedral will remain a welcoming home for worshipers for centuries to come.

The growth of our diocese has been amplified in many other ways. In September, I traveled to Unicoi County to elevate St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Mission as the newest parish in the Diocese of Knoxville. The Glenmary Home Missioners founded St. Michael with 36 members just six years ago. I am grateful for their hard work and the dedication and the financial supports of all the members of that community, which now grows to more than 300. An annual parish mission center, including worship space, was recently constructed on property in Erwin purchased by the Catholic Foundation of East Tennessee. Someday soon, St. Michael parishioners hope to build a permanent church on that site.

The St. Mary’s Legacy Clinic celebrated the 50th anniversary of its establishment in 2018. Sister Mariana Koonce, RSM, a licensed medical doctor, has grown this mobile medical mission to now include many volunteer doctors, nurses, and staff who bring the healing ministry of Jesus to people in desperate need of medical care in six communities in our region.

Because of you, our diocesan fund has expanded to now include more than 70,000 registered members. I continue to thank each day for all the support and gifts that you give with gladness.

You can feel confident that, as your bishop, the resources you have entrusted to us — whether through time, talent, or treasure — are being administered with wisdom and respect, and with the sole purpose being able to continue the mission of Jesus. I extend my thanks and gratitude for all your work, through hard work and sacrifice, to make the Diocese of Knoxville and the Catholic Church in East Tennessee a living, relevant force for good.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika
Bishop of Knoxville