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OFFICE OF THE BISHOP  
DIOCESE OF KNOXVILLE

July 21, 2021

Dear Clergy and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Knoxville:

This past Friday, July 16, 2021, Pope Francis published *Traditionis Custodes* (“Guardians of the tradition”), an Apostolic Letter issued *motu proprio* on the use of the Roman Liturgy prior to the reform of 1970 (Traditional Latin Mass). The *motu proprio* allows individual bishops to authorize the use of the Traditional Latin Mass in their respective dioceses and abrogates previous norms, instructions, permissions, and customs delineated in Pope Benedict’s 2007 apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum*. I take seriously my role as guardian of the sacred liturgy for the Diocese of Knoxville, therefore, it is my duty to direct the celebration of the pre-conciliar liturgy in accord with the mind of the Church expressed in this latest document from Pope Francis. However, I have a pastoral solicitude for those attached to this liturgy and see in them much faithfulness and fruitfulness. With the express provision that those attached to this form of the Mass reaffirm their submission to the Roman Pontiff, the full teachings of the Second Vatican Council and the validity and liceity of the post-conciliar reforms of the liturgy, I wish to offer the opportunity for this liturgy to continue in the Diocese of Knoxville.

One provision of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter states that bishops are to “designate” the locations of traditional liturgies, adding that they cannot be offered at “parochial churches.” Owing to the fact that currently all of the places where this Mass is offered are in parochial churches, with no readily available alternatives, for the good of the faithful, I temporarily dispense from this provision for the sake of the common good (canon 87 §1). It is my hope that in the course of time and with due clarification from proper authority, we will be able to arrive at a sound solution to this provision of the new document. Also, at this point, those priests who currently celebrate the Traditional Latin Mass and other sacraments within the territory of the Diocese of Knoxville may continue to do so. Additionally, I grant to all priests ordained before July 16, 2021, the faculty to celebrate the Sacred Liturgy using the liturgical books prior to the reform of 1970 until I issue further guidance.

In the coming weeks, after I have carefully studied and prayerfully discerned the aforementioned *motu proprio*, I will develop a pastoral plan for its application and issue a decree with delineated norms in accord with the directives of the Holy Father.

I ask all of you to join me with renewed efforts to foster unity among all Catholics, especially with the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy. Know that during my upcoming time of careful study and prayerful discernment, I will be invoking the intercession of St Joseph, whom we honor with the title “Patron of the Universal Church.”

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend Richard F. Stika