



The Diocese of Knoxville

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

MEDIA ADVISORY
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Bishop Richard F. Stika retires

Knoxville--- Bishop Richard F. Stika, the longest serving bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville, has announced he is retiring from the post he has held since 2009.

“I recently sent a letter to the Holy Father, Pope Francis, asking him to grant my petition to retire as the bishop of this great diocese,” Bishop Stika said. “I am grateful that he has accepted this request.”

The announcement was made by the Vatican on June 27:

“Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Bishop Richard F. Stika from the pastoral governance of the Diocese of Knoxville. At the same time, the Holy See has appointed the Most Reverend Shelton Fabre, Archbishop of Louisville, as the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Knoxville to serve until the appointment and installation of a new bishop,” the Vatican announcement said.

Bishop Stika was appointed bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville by Pope Benedict XVI on Jan. 12, 2009, and was officially installed as the diocese’s third bishop on March 19, 2009.

“People will speculate on why I am doing this. I have been dealing with life-threatening health issues most of my adult life. I have been living with Type-1 diabetes since 1980. I nearly died from a diabetic coma in 2009 and as a result I lost vision in one of my eyes. I was hospitalized for another grave diabetic scare in 2015. I have survived a heart attack, heart bypass surgery, and I have four heart stents. I am also suffering from neuropathy. Last month, I was transported to a hospital in East Tennessee for another health issue.

“I recognize that questions about my leadership have played out publicly in recent months. I would be less than honest if I didn’t admit that some of this has weighed on me physically and emotionally. For these reasons, I asked the Holy Father for relief from my responsibilities as a diocesan bishop.

(more)

“On July 4, I will turn 66 years old. God has blessed me abundantly. I have been a Catholic priest for most of that time and I have tried my best to be a good shepherd. We have built and dedicated many new churches including a much-needed cathedral, improved our schools, expanded care for the sick and vulnerable, and as always, I have tried to teach Jesus wherever I go.

“My desire is to remain in active ministry, but at a slower pace. I would like to do so near my hometown, St. Louis, and continue to live with Cardinal Justin Rigali, whom I have known for almost 30 years and who has been in residence with me in Knoxville for 12 years.

“I have tremendous love for East Tennessee. It has been my home for almost 15 years, and I plan to return often as Bishop Emeritus to visit friends, celebrate Masses when asked, and take in UT games.

“While not intentional, I believe it’s not a coincidence that I made my decision last month, during a time when our Scripture readings, found in Acts of the Apostles, focused on the turbulent growth of the Church. Reading Scripture is good. It reminds us that the Church isn’t perfect—it’s human, but it continues to grow in goodness, thanks be to God.

“I offer my genuine and heartfelt apology to anyone I have disappointed over the years. I have tremendous respect for everyone, even my detractors. I ask that you pray for Archbishop Fabre as he oversees this diocese in the short term and for your new bishop when he is selected. Finally, I humbly ask that you please pray for me.”

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