



The Diocese of Knoxville

Living our Roman Catholic faith in East Tennessee

MEDIA ADVISORY

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Bishop Stika becomes longest-serving bishop of Diocese of Knoxville

KNOXVILLE- It turns out that July 2019 will be a memorable month for Bishop Richard F. Stika. Three days before he celebrates his 62nd birthday on July 4, Bishop Stika reached another significant milestone. On July 1, Bishop Stika became the longest-serving bishop in the history of the Diocese of Knoxville.

“I am grateful that Pope Benedict XVI, through the Holy Spirit, placed me here more than ten years ago to serve, in Christ, the faithful of the Diocese of Knoxville,” Bishop Stika said upon learning of this milestone.

Bishop Stika’s tenure as the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church in East Tennessee has been highlighted with growth and stability. When he arrived in 2009, the Diocese of Knoxville had 45 parish churches, 72 priests, 25 deacons, and 36 men and women religious. There were roughly 58,000 registered Catholics in the diocese. The seat of the bishop was a parish church that had been used as a cathedral since the establishment of the diocese in 1988.

Just over ten years after Bishop Stika’s appointment, the Diocese of Knoxville now has 50 parishes and two Catholic missions. There are 85 priests, 78 deacons, and 59 men and women religious serving here. The diocese has nearly 73,000 registered Catholics, a new cathedral, and new parish churches where Catholic missions once existed.

At the direction of Bishop Stika, the St. Mary’s Legacy Clinic, a mobile medical clinic serving in mostly rural areas of East Tennessee, began service in 2014. According to the Official Catholic Directory, the Diocese of Knoxville provided for the care and welfare of more than 69,000 people in 2018. That figure reflects an increase of more than 20,000 people assisted and served compared to 2008.

The diocese now has 13 men studying in seminary for the priesthood.

“The Diocese of Knoxville is very different from where I was ordained as a priest and lived my entire life,” Bishop Stika, a St. Louis native, noted. “It is, at its core, a mission diocese that is vibrant, and exudes a spirit that guided the Apostles in the early days of the Church. We are still relatively young, and we continue to grow. I am very blessed to be here and I thank God for this gift,” Bishop Stika added.

July 1 marks 3,822 days since Bishop Stika was appointed bishop of the diocese on Jan. 12, 2009, making him the longest-serving bishop in the history of the Diocese of Knoxville.

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