

October 12, 2022

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
Most Reverend Archbishop Jose Horacio Gomez Velasco, President
Fourth Street NE
Washington, DC

Apostolic Nunciature, the Holy See
Most Reverend Archbishop Christophe Pierre
3339 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20008

Most Reverend Archbishop Shelton Joseph Fabre
Archdiocese of Louisville
3940 Poplar Level Road
Louisville, KY 40213-1463

RE: Diocese of Knoxville, Most Reverend Bishop Richard Stika

Your Excellencies,

The following Catholic citizens of the Catholic parishes in the Diocese of Knoxville appeal to your eminences to consider our petitions to remove the Most Reverend Bishop Richard Stika as Bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville.

After many years of issues that we feel violate Canon laws and the civil laws of the land as well as constitute a breach of trust with the laity of the Diocese of Knoxville, we feel Bishop Stika must retire and/or relocate to another diocese.

These issues have been documented in the local papers, in *The Pillar*, on local television, on *You Tube* and on Blogs over a period of four or more years and seem to be escalating since a recent well publicized court case in the Knox County, TN courts where the judge “struck down the Diocese of Knoxville’s plea to dismiss a lawsuit which alleges that Knoxville’s bishop impeded a diocesan investigation into a rape allegation, and defamed an alleged rape victim, by charging publicly that the victim was actually the aggressor.” (*The Pillar*, August 3, 2022) Although the attorneys for Bishop Stika argued that the bishop was not required to turn over any information or records related to the incident of the rape, Judge Jerome Melton agreed with the plaintiff’s attorney that said information and records were not ecclesiastical matters but rather civil matters. Exhaustive printed and online records exist which have proven sickeningly vivid in every detail of both the act of the alleged rape and the step-by-step pattern of the alleged coverup of the rape. Enough is enough. (*The Pillar, Knoxville News, WVLT*)

If this was the only alleged sexual attack coverup, that would be unfortunate but perhaps that does happen; however, incident after incident, with priests who have been moved, no action taken to

address the sexual attacks, and outright lying or denying that there is a problem or that any incident has happened is outrageous!

Frankly, we are all exhausted and disheartened with all the recent years of problems within Bishop Stika's office. Sex scandals related to Bishop Stika's sponsorship and defense of a Polish seminarian present a snapshot of bizarre behavior symptomatic of other "incidents." Bishop Stika, even when presented with factual evidence of serious misbehavior by the seminarian, denied the facts, ignored advisors, and declared himself the authority. This behavior is a pattern of operation in most matters. This same seminarian was asked to leave two seminaries after his behavior towards other males rendered him unsuitable. Bishop Stika did not agree. He denied everyone else's statements. This same seminarian made advances towards a staff member at the Chancery. The staff member left because he was not believed. Finally, when the former seminarian was put on the Chancery payroll, he groomed an organist at the church and allegedly raped him. This matter is still unresolved in the courts. The man moved into Bishop Stika's residence where he broadcast a blog of his daily life from the residence. This is just one example.

We are also concerned with financial improprieties which have appeared throughout Bishop Stika's administration. Many parishes have had large sums of money bequeathed to the parish, that many parishes use for capital improvements or emergency repairs, claimed by the bishop's staff - at his direction - for diocesan use. These appropriations have caused hard feelings if not feelings of out right stealing from the parishes. One parish had 400,000 dollars appropriated when the bishop learned of its existence.

The true cost of the cathedral and the lack of any discussion of budgeting for the cathedral raised distrust and values questions in our minds. Many of the laity in the diocese maybe understood the need for a cathedral but questioned the exorbitant plan and materials cost in relation to the greater needs of people in the diocese and the world. Many felt that the cathedral became a monument to Bishop Stika's vanity, is tremendously overpriced, and far exceeds the needs of such a small diocese. Insiders say that the true cost of the project is being hidden and is far greater than reported. The Chancery bookkeeper recently resigned, reportedly saying that she took money and spent it on what Bishop Stika told her. Although these are allegations, once again, there are hints of improprieties.

As a result of the financial losses due to the Pandemic, the U.S. government awarded businesses PPP funds to cover gaps in funding; the Diocese of Knoxville received an award of PPP money, some going to the schools. After the fact and after the schools had been told a dollar amount each school would be awarded, each school set their budgets and proceeded to spend the funds. At some later time, Bishop Stika decided he needed more of the funds for the diocese and demanded 25% of the funds be returned to the diocese. Really? Again, mistrust of anyone who asks questions, no explanations, arrogance in the face of any questioning, this is Bishop Stika's pattern.

Many in the diocese see the bishop as a political extremist who divides rather than unites. It is not easy being a Catholic in East Tennessee and the Appalachia area. We are surrounded by a Protestant population, heavily slanted toward evangelical Christians. They are gleeful with all the problems our diocese has had and is having with Bishop Stika! They use it as fodder for many sermons about our corruption and tolerance for homosexual priests and criminal activity. Bishop

Stika has done nothing for setting a good example of what Catholics are like and what we believe in. When we were young and attending Catholic schools, our beloved Sisters of Mercy out of Cincinnati, Ohio, impressed upon us that we Catholics were the minority in this area of the country, and we should “always set a good example.” Setting a good example, the sisters felt, would further the Catholic faith and bring people closer to God. Bishop Stika has instead set our diocese “back,” impeded any forward progress towards spreading the faith; rather, he has made us look sexually promiscuous and sexually deviate.

Those who have signed this petition are staunch, life-long Catholics. Their affiliation with the church goes back literally generations to Ireland, Italy, and many other countries. Their forefathers built, with their own hands, the mined stone from local quarries for the first parishes in the diocese.

Your inactivity regarding the removal of Bishop Stika from the Diocese of Knoxville, despite previous numerous pleas from priests and laity, is an insult to the fine Catholic families who have sacrificed so much since 1845 to protect and nourish Catholicity in Knoxville, TN. The signees are descendants of the First Catholic Families. They are teachers, businessmen and women, lawyers, federal judges, all prominent, active in the Catholic church.

If your inactivity is based on not having a replacement for Bishop Stika, we recommend appointing a temporary administrator. A current monsignor in the diocese who manages money well and has the trust of the priests and laity would be ideal.

Please act on this matter. Time is of the essence. The saddest result of Bishop Stika’s conduct are those souls who have turned away from the Catholic church and God because of the bad example Bishop Stika has exhibited as God’s representative on Earth. The faithful losing faith: A sad legacy for our diocese. This travesty must be on your conscience now.

The below individuals acknowledge and attest that they are members of a parish within the Diocese of Knoxville and support the statements made herein:

Printed Name

Signature

