

Archbishop Shelton J. Fabre remarks for the Diocese of Knoxville
Aug. 14, 2023

My dear friends in Christ, since my appointment as apostolic administrator at the end of June, a lot has taken place. Over the past six weeks, I have spent time becoming familiar with the people and with the concerns of this wonderful Diocese of Knoxville. I want now to take this opportunity to update you on some of what has taken place over the last few weeks.

Bishop Stika and Cardinal Rigali continue the process of relocating to St. Louis. Their move is scheduled for completion no later than the end of August.

I have endeavored to come to a greater understanding of this diocese. Accordingly, my dear friends, I am here tonight. I will be in the Tri-Cities tomorrow and in Knoxville twice later this week for celebrations of the Eucharist in the other deaneries of the diocese.

My travels provide me opportunities to visit Church parishes— Church parishes, the heart of the Church, to celebrate the Eucharist – the sacrament of thanksgiving, with you, dear people of God, in thanksgiving for you, the wonderful people of the Knoxville diocese.

These Masses also give me the opportunity to pray with you, to greet you, to interact with you, and to gain further insight into the pastoral needs of this diocese. Thank you very much for your presence here tonight.

I am deeply grateful for your enduring faith and for your support of the Diocese of Knoxville. I am also grateful to all who have put forth an effort to provide for each of the four deanery Masses taking place this week. I thank my brother priests, and deacons, and deacons' wives, seminarians, consecrated men and women religious: thank you all for being here as well.

As my schedule will permit, I also look forward to celebrating Mass in other Church parishes, as well as with our African-American, Asian-American, and Hispanic-American Catholic communities, all of whom contribute to the faith, the richness, and the ethnic diversity of the Diocese of Knoxville.

During my trips to Knoxville, I have enjoyed days of grace to meet, visit, and to work with priests, deacons, consecrated religious, Chancery staff, and lay leaders in ministry. The many meetings I have been in have allowed me an opportunity to gain beneficial insight into how the Diocese of Knoxville operates. Together with these leaders, we have given attention to the administrative needs of the diocese. Among these administrative needs, a new school year has begun, the formation of the next class of permanent deacons continues, and we continue the critical outreach of Catholic Charities. We are also preparing for the annual independent, external diocesan financial audit. This year we will include a review of the financial policies and procedures of the

diocese, a recommended best practice for any company or non-profit entity when it changes leadership.

It has also been my privilege to visit some of the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Knoxville. What a joy it has been to meet the students, teachers, faculty, and staff, and to ask God's blessing on this new year of formation and education in our Catholic schools. Catholic identity is an important part of Catholic schools, and the Holy Spirit is indeed active in your Catholic schools. Young people are an important part of the Church, and faith formation in Catholic schools and in parish schools of religion is essential to help them to nurture a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I have met with your priests. They are wonderful men. I am deeply grateful for the many ways they engage in pastoral ministry among you, the people of God. As your priests come together a few times a year in a convocation over a day or over several days, these opportunities allow for priests to pray, share meals, and discuss together parish, diocesan, and Church issues. We have arranged for the priests of Knoxville to come together at the beginning of September for a special convocation. This gathering at the beginning of September will not only allow us to celebrate the Eucharist and pray together each day but also to look for ways to strengthen the fraternity among the priests with the help of a facilitator. This is intended to help us to move forward together in joyful hope as we prepare for the next bishop of Knoxville. Our sharing together will ensure that we are striving to be the holy priests that Jesus is calling us to be for – and in service to – you, the people of the Diocese of Knoxville.

My recent meeting with your diocesan seminarians produced a wonderful discussion about the spiritual fruits that came from their summer activities and their coming year of formation. Please remember to pray for them as they continue to discern God's will in their lives.

Similarly, we are also seeking a time and place in the near future to meet with the permanent deacons and their wives as well as the consecrated men and women religious who serve in the Diocese of Knoxville.

My dear friends in Christ, this is a brief overview of the past six weeks. As I conclude my sharing this information with you tonight, I do so where I began at the Mass I celebrated in June on that day when I arrived as your apostolic administrator. During the homily at that Mass, I asked three questions: "Where are we now? Where is God? Where are we going?" To these three questions, I would like now to give an updated response.

Where are we? I hope this update provides you with more information regarding where we are at present here in the Diocese of Knoxville. I firmly believe that we are in a grace-filled season of hope and renewal, grace-filled and hopeful because we remain open to God's will and direction as we face current and future challenges. If we trust the Lord and desire to accomplish His will, that is what will happen. God's will will come about. I know with full faith that as long as we work together, we will succeed.

Where is God and where are we going? Please know that I believe God is in the midst of our efforts to build up the kingdom of God in the ways that I have shared here tonight – and in countless other ways in the Diocese of Knoxville. God is with us through our faith, through our encounters with one another, through meetings and continued dialogue, as we ever more boldly proclaim the kingdom of God on earth, and in doing so continue the work of His Son, Jesus Christ, here in the Diocese of Knoxville.

At this point in time, we continue our journey together and look to Jesus Christ, placing our faith, our hope, our trust in Him, as did Mary, His mother. We continue to pray for, and with, one another, and to pray for the next bishop of Knoxville. Until the Holy Father, Pope Francis – through the working of the Holy Spirit – names a new bishop of Knoxville, please know that I joyfully remain with you in faith and in function. Please be assured of my prayers for you, as I beseech your prayers for me. Amen.

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