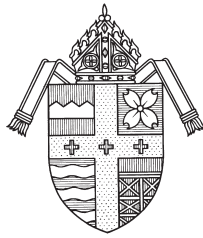


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# The Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville

Contact: Deacon Sean Smith, chancellor  
Phone: 865-584-3307  
E-mail: [ssmith@dioknox.org](mailto:ssmith@dioknox.org)



The Chancery  
805 Northshore Drive  
Knoxville, Tenn. 37919  
[www.dioknox.org](http://www.dioknox.org)

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## **PRESS RELEASE AND MEDIA ADVISORY**

**For immediate release**

**March 5, 2010**

# Bishop Stika responds to distribution of anti-Catholic tracts

KNOXVILLE—Bishop Richard F. Stika of the Diocese of Knoxville has made the following statement in response to the recently publicized distribution of anti-Catholic tracts in Pigeon Forge:

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Knoxville includes 47 parishes and 36 counties in East Tennessee, including Holy Cross Parish in Pigeon Forge. As bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville, I wish first to state my deep respect and love for my Protestant brothers and sisters, with whom we acknowledge and worship but one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—and for all the members of other faiths, with whom we also share certain foundational beliefs.

I also wish to acknowledge the many Christian denominations, including the many Baptist churches in East Tennessee, with whom we pray and work in solidarity, according to the truths of the Gospel, in order to promote a culture of life. This culture of life is based on a Christian anthropology that recognizes man and woman as images of God, an essential truth for the formation of a correct vision of society. I am thinking also of our shared efforts in promoting and protecting the sanctity and dignity of every person in the womb and of the holy institution of marriage and the family as our Heavenly Creator designed them to be.

At this moment, however, I am greatly saddened by the reprehensible acts of prejudice and hatred of a few souls who, out of ignorance of Catholic teachings, have promoted the distribution of anti-Catholic tracts. These tracts contain outright lies and blatant exaggerations.

The rationale one Baptist pastor gave in support of distributing these reprehensible, discriminatory, and bigoted tracts was that he was trying to point out the primary difference his church has with Catholics: the belief that a person does not and cannot work his or her way to salvation. Unfortunately, this pastor does not have a correct understanding of what the Catholic faith teaches in this regard—and he even admitted as much.

In Catholic theology, the term *justification* means the cleansing of a person's sin and the communication—

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by grace—of “the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:22) through baptism. Additionally, Catholics take very seriously the Sacred Scripture, “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24).

Perhaps some Christians misinterpret both Paul and James, thus concluding that their statements about faith and works contradict each other. This is simply not true. There are differences in emphasis but no contradictions in teaching if one understands both properly. Paul and James agree that both “faith” and “works” are essential to Christian life.

Jesus himself makes this crystal clear in his description of the Last Judgment (Matthew 25:31-46). From his judgment seat, the Lord will welcome into his eternal kingdom those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, and visited the sick and imprisoned—in other words, those who saw Christ in the suffering and acted in response, inspired by the love of God. Those who did not perform these “works” of love will “go off to eternal punishment” (25:46).

Catholics take the “works” cited above very seriously. As an example, empowered by the grace of Jesus Christ, Catholic Charities of East Tennessee Inc. addresses the unmet needs of the most vulnerable of our region by providing shelter, nourishment, counseling, and education in order to foster human dignity. Catholic Charities of East Tennessee delivers 17 services through 24 programs throughout the region. This agency's services are provided regardless of religious affiliation, race, or ability to pay: fewer than 5 percent of the more than 20,000 clients served annually are Catholic.

Regarding the reprehensible leaflet titled “The Death Cookie”: The Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence asserts that in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus is literally and wholly present—body and blood, soul and divinity—under the appearances of bread and wine. Some Christians attack this doctrine as “unbiblical,” but Catholics believe that the Bible is forthright in declaring it (1 Corinthians 10:16–17 and 11:23–29 and, most forcefully, John 6:32–71).

Catholics recognize that many of our Christian brothers and sisters do not share our belief in the Real Presence. Even though we may not share the same doctrinal belief, we are thankful that our Christian brothers and sisters of different faiths deeply respect the Lord's Supper and what it represents. Even the Southern Baptist Convention states, “The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.”

As bishop of the Diocese of Knoxville, I pray that all Christian pastors will develop a spirituality of ecumenism, with a willingness to explore with other Christians the common beliefs of our Christianity—primarily our belief in the one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—rather than focus on our differences.

The leaflets produced by Chick Publications and distributed locally are hateful, discriminatory, and full of prejudice and bigotry.

Jesus warns that each of us will be judged by the same standard with which we judge others. If we are harsh or judgmental in our analysis of others, we will face harsh analysis. Those who are gentle and gracious toward others will be treated gently and graciously. Perhaps we should remember the golden rule: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12).