DIOCESE *of* GAYLORD

October 22, 2026

My Dear People,

As a follow-up to the liturgical decrees issued one week ago on October 15, 2026, I feel obliged to offer the following reflection and hopefully offer a few clarifications.

The Second Vatican Council, returning to original sources, was the 21st and most recent ecumenical council of the Catholic Church and as such is an integral part of Church Tradition. It is my hope that we are all "Traditional Catholics" and trust the workings of the Holy Spirit guiding the Church throughout time.

These decrees adhere to and are in continuity with Vatican II documents and the post Vatican II pontificates of St. Pope Paul VI, St. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, Pope Francis and Pope Leo XIV, following suit with previous listed popes. Over the past nearly 60 years, with rare exception, each pope has celebrated public Masses *versus populum* at St. Peter's Basilica and with congregations both large and small during their world travels. In addition, every liturgical celebration in which I have participated in my lifetime, including the Roman Rite Masses celebrated at the National Eucharistic Congress, has been *versus populum.*

Since implementation in 1970, God has continued to raise up holy men and women through the Novus Ordo Mass. At every Mass, the priest, *in persona Christi Capitis* offers the holy sacrifice by which we are redeemed with reverence and in noble simplicity. The faithful kneel in wonder and awe during the consecration and know it is Christ who becomes present. With humility, Christ is received and then we are sent to live the Gospel message in fulfillment of our baptismal call to holiness. Our focus is on Christ, and his sanctifying grace.

As bishop, it is my duty to ensure consistent norms for the liturgy and foster unity. My guidance regarding *versus populum/ad orientem* at this time of our Pastoral Plan 2026 is a way to provide the stability of the norm for our people attending Sunday Masses, Holy Day of Obligation Masses, Wedding Masses and Funeral Masses at all 56 parishes in our diocese.

It may also be helpful to note what these decrees do not address. The provisions regarding the celebration of the Mass *versus populum* pertain to the *Novus Ordo* (Mass of Paul VI). They do not affect the Masses celebrated according to the 1962 Missal at the three designated locations in our diocese. In addition, the decrees do not impose a complete restriction on *ad orientem*. Respectful of the legitimate liturgical diversity permitted by the Church, my desire for these decrees is to provide clarity, consistency and unity.

The Church has been richly blessed by the Vatican II Council's call to the lay faithful to be active in the Church exercising ministries that are rooted in the dignity of the priestly, prophetic and royal inheritance we receive at baptism. Lay faithful are also to be engaged in the liturgy with full, active and conscious participation. In Pope Francis' 2021 *motu proprio Spiritus Domini*, the ministries of lector and acolyte were given new canonical status. With this doctrinal development, women and girls can be admitted on a stable basis through the prescribed liturgical rites.

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We give thanks to God for the many gifts and talents of women and offer eternal gratitude for those who have fulfilled their call to holiness in the sacrament of matrimony, the vocation of motherhood, and in Consecrated Life. In addition, what St. John Paul II called the feminine genius enhances the life of our parish homes, communities and offices. Most priests work daily with women on parish staff, and we are currently blessed in the Diocese of Gaylord with women who serve in the roles of Chief of Staff, Director of Canonical Affairs, Chancellor, Director of Finance, Superintendent of Catholic Schools, Director of Communications, Director of Information Technology, Director of Faith Formation, Director of Human Resources, Executive Assistant to the Bishop, Directors of Parish Life (3), and numerous other valuable members of the diocesan team.

Men and boys who serve at the altar should continue to be invited to consider the invitation to Holy Orders and be encouraged to respond generously if they hear the Lord calling them to the vocations of priesthood or diaconate. It is important for our 12 current seminarians and those who may one day follow them to know that the priestly ministry we pray they will one day fulfill is consistent with what they are taught and experience in seminary.

The use of Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion is also guided by the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. According to the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the norms approved for the United States by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the principle that guides my third decree is to have a sufficient number of ministers of Holy Communion so that it may be distributed in a reverent and orderly manner and so that large liturgies are not unduly prolonged. The Church is wise in every spiritual and practical way.

It is my hope that conversations about sacred liturgy, in light of these decrees, will be fruitful. It is understood that there will be disagreement and the particulars of theology and canon law can be debated, but the essence of what unites us in charity must be maintained. To that end, I want to once again, affirm our priests in the Diocese of Gaylord. All our priests love the Lord and his Church. None of us do it perfectly, but we all strive to do our best.

"Humbly we pray that, partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ, we may be gathered into one by the Holy Spirit." (Eucharistic Prayer II).

In Christ our Life!

Most Reverend Jeffrey J. Walsh
Bishop of Gaylord