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A white man with brown hair and glasses smiles at the camera. He wears a clerical collar and

Bishop John C. Iffert of Covington, Ky., is pictured in an undated photo. Iffert has rescinded permission for Fr. Shannon Collins, pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Park Hills, and Fr. Sean Kopczynsji, parochial vicar, to minister in his diocese after they publicly dismissed the contemporary celebration of the Mass as "irrelevant." (OSV News photo/Courtesy Diocese of Covington)



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Covington, Ky. — January 24, 2024

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The bishop of Covington has rescinded permission for two priests to minister in his diocese after they publicly dismissed the contemporary celebration of Mass in the Roman rite as "irrelevant."

Bishop John C. Iffert Jan. 16 requested the resignation of Fr. Shannon Collins as pastor of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Park Hills, a Covington suburb. Fr. Sean Kopczynski also has been removed as the parish's parochial vicar. The bishop also removed the priests' faculties to teach, preach or celebrate sacraments.

While they are not permitted to celebrate the Mass publicly, the priests may celebrate Mass privately for themselves, immediate family members and members of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist, a fledgling religious community in Covington they founded.

The Missionaries of St. John the Baptist is a public association of the faithful dedicated to the celebration of the liturgy and sacraments according to the 1962 Roman Missal. Bishop Roger J. Foys of Covington, who retired in 2021, formally erected the community as a public association of the faithful in 2019, although the priests have been serving in the diocese since at least 2011. The priests were working toward eventual recognition of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist as an institute of diocesan right within the Diocese of Covington.

Iffert, who has led the Covington Diocese since 2021, said in a Jan. 17 letter to members of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish that he removed the priests' faculties after learning that Collins "had preached in the parish that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, as celebrated in the current Roman Catholic liturgy, is 'irrelevant,' preserves 'literally nothing of the old,' and that the reform of the liturgy was motivated by hatred towards traditional Catholics and the ancient liturgies of Rome."

According to the letter, "Both Father Collins and Father Kopczynski maintain these errors and refuse the opportunity to renounce them. This disqualifies them from being granted permission to publicly celebrate the Sacraments using the 1962 Missale Romanum and from leading a personal parish like Our Lady of Lourdes."

Our Lady of Lourdes was founded in 2016 to serve Catholics who wished to worship in Latin according to the 1962 Roman Missal, the last edition prior to the Second Vatican Council's liturgical reforms. The vast majority of Catholics in the Latin Church celebrate Mass according to the 2002 Roman Missal promulgated by St. John Paul II.

As a "personal parish," Our Lady of Lourdes serves a unique community, not a designated geographical area. The community was entrusted to the leadership of Collins and Kopczynski, formerly members of the Fathers of Mercy in Bowling Green, Kentucky, who were ordained in 2000 but left that community to begin the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist.

According to a 2019 story in the Messenger, newspaper of the Diocese of Covington, the priests do not consider themselves founders of a religious community, but rather as expanding the patrimony of the Fathers of Mercy.

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Collins is a former rector of the Shrine of the Most Blessed Sacrament of Our Lady of the Angels Monastery in Hanceville, Alabama, founded by Mother Angelica. He has appeared on EWTN and in other Catholic media.

In his letter, Iffert wrote, "I did not take this action lightly" and said he consulted with the diocese's vicar general, deans, judicial vicar and other bishops as he determined how to handle the situation.

"For some time now, I had serious concerns about the parish's pastoral leadership," he wrote. "I attempted to resolve those concerns in conversation and fraternal correction with these priests, who are brothers and sons to me. Regretfully I have been unable to do so."

According to a Jan. 19 story in the Messenger, the board of the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist, not the diocese, owns the church building where Our Lady of Lourdes Parish worshipped, and considers it the public association's chapel. With the bishop's action, the Missionaries of St. John the Baptist "are no longer willing to permit the diocese or Our Lady of Lourdes Parish to use the building," the Messenger reported.

A message on the parish's website states that there are currently "no public Masses, Confessions, or other Sacramental Rituals ... for the foreseeable future" offered at the church.

In a Jan. 19 letter to Our Lady of Lourdes parishioners, Iffert said St. Ann Mission in Covington would share its church building with their parish, and Fr. Matthew Cushing, pastor of All Saints in Walton, Kentucky, would celebrate the Mass according to the 1962 missal twice each Sunday, beginning Jan. 21.

St. Ann Mission is located less than two miles north of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish's previous church.

"I look forward to assisting Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in achieving ongoing stability and in your goal of promoting beauty and reverence the Church's worship," Iffert said in the Jan. 19 letter. "I give thanks to God for you, and I pray for you diligently during this moment of difficult transition. I am grateful to all who are willing to labor within the Church for the Glory of God."