News

A sacramentary is seen on the altar during a traditional Latin Mass.

A sacramentary is seen on the altar during a traditional Latin Mass in this file photo dated July 18, 2021, at St. Josaphat Church, Flushing, in the Queens borough of New York City. (OSV News/Gregory Shemitz)

Gina Christian

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A leaked draft document on revising liturgical norms in the Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina, has stirred backlash for addressing some practices predating the Second Vatican Council.

However, diocesan communications director Liz Chandler told OSV News the leaked document was "an early draft that has gone through considerable change over several months," with discussions taking place in a consultative manner among the diocese's presbyteral council and divine worship office.

A copy of the undated 7,800-word pastoral letter — titled "Go In Peace, Glorifying the Lord By Your Life," and apparently written by Charlotte Bishop Michael Martin — was uploaded May 28 to the blog Rorate Caeli, an online platform that describes itself as "international, traditional, Catholic."

Chandler confirmed the authenticity of the letter, but noted in a statement that "it represented a starting point to update our liturgical norms and methods of catechesis for receiving the Eucharist.

"Once our norms have been thoroughly reviewed in accord with the norms of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, any changes will be shared through the diocese's regular communications channels," she said.

The Diocese of Charlotte's liturgical norms have not been updated since they were issued in 2005 by Bishop Peter Jugis, who last year stepped down from the pastoral governance of the Diocese of Charlotte due to health reasons. They were again revised in 2011.

The Rorate Caeli post — written by a user identified only as "New Catholic" — slammed the draft letter as "anti-traditional" and "anti-liturgical."

Perhaps most notably, the early draft suggested Martin viewed the celebration of Mass "*ad orientem*," with the priest and people facing the same direction during the celebration of the Eucharist, as "not appropriate" and therefore would not be permitted in the diocese. The early draft also proposed limiting Latin in the liturgy to situations where a majority of people understood Latin. "I find it disturbing that so many pastors and celebrants are inclined to force an unknown language on their congregation when the Lord’s mission is to engage the lost," Martin wrote in the draft.

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The draft also addressed a number of liturgical or devotional practices associated with church life before Vatican II, including stating that the communal recitation of the St. Michael Prayer at the end of Mass "can lead to the unfortunate doubt that the Eucharistic liturgy is somehow insufficient to bring about the scattering of evil and motivation to do good."

But the draft also warned against using the reformed Roman missal, promulgated by St. Paul VI fully by 1970 and revised by Pope John Paul II in 2002, "as a type of living dynamic that can expand or contract" at the discretion of clergy.

"This troubling dynamic fails to envision the liturgy as the noble work of the entire Church ... but degrades it as a personal tool amid a cultural tug-of-war that is reminiscent of what is present in our country today," the bishop wrote in his draft.

The Archdiocese of Detroit also has updated its policy on the traditional Latin Mass. In a June 13 letter to the faithful, Archbishop Edward Weisenburger announced that four regional sites in the archdiocese will be provided for the celebration of the extraordinary form of the Mass beginning July 1.

In April, the archdiocese had announced that most celebrations of the extraordinary form of the Mass would end.

Altar servers lead the closing procession during a traditional Latin Mass at Immaculate Conce

Altar servers lead the closing procession during a traditional Latin Mass at Immaculate Conception Seminary in Huntington, N.Y., in this July 1, 2021, file photo. (OSV News/Gregory Shemitz)

The early draft in Charlotte aimed to discourage telling people that one form of receiving holy Communion — either on the tongue or in the hand — was "better" than the other. It also sought to address liturgical practices that restrict lay people from the distribution of Communion under both kinds, that eliminate the procession of the gifts or exchange of the sign of peace before Communion, or that limit altar serving to boys. (Pope Francis clarified that women and men could perform the lay ministries of acolyte and lector, which include altar service and reading at Mass, in 2021.)

In the document, Martin also cited as "completely inappropriate" the spontaneous practice prevalent among some Hispanic Catholics of exclaiming "My Lord and my God" during the elevation of the host and the chalice during Mass, saying it was "absent in the rubrics of the Mass." Diocesan officials clarified that half of their more than 565,000 faithful are Spanish-speaking.

"We tend to preface our decision making with phrases such as, 'If only our Church went back to …,' or 'If only the Church would adapt to …,'" Martin wrote. "Far from delivering us from the anxiety we wish to escape, it only reinforces its own necessity to cling to this or that, further drawing us away from a real encounter with the true life of Jesus that is exemplified in his Incarnation and communicated to us through

the faithful celebration of the liturgy."

Pointing to resources available from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, he said that legitimate adaptations can be made "according to the liturgical prescriptions of the Mass," especially in pastoral situations including children, the elderly and people with special needs and disabilities.

A few days before the draft document was leaked, Martin announced that he was consolidating the celebration of Mass in Latin according to the 1962 Roman Missal — commonly called the "traditional Latin Mass" or TLM — from four locations to one centrally located chapel in the diocese as part of his final implementation of a 2021 apostolic letter by Pope Francis called *Traditionis Custodes*. A diocesan priest will be appointed chaplain for the liturgical form at a designated, yet-unnamed chapel in Mooresville, North Carolina.

The Catholic News Herald, Charlotte's diocesan news outlet, reported June 3 that the effective date will be Oct. 2, not July 8 as originally announced, because Oct. 2 aligns with a deadline mandated by the Vatican.

Jugis, Martin's predecessor, had "requested and received from the Holy See an extension for the Diocese of Charlotte in order to arrange an orderly transition to the new instructions," according to a statement on the diocese's website.

The new date allows more time for the transition and for renovation of the chapel designated for the TLM community, Martin said in an email to priests June 3.

The bishop accepted a request from the four parish priests that he wait until the Vatican’s Oct. 2 deadline to implement the changes.

The change affects an estimated 1,000 of the diocese's total population of more than 565,000 faithful, according to diocesan officials.

Commenters on the Facebook page of the Charlotte Traditional Latin Mass community expressed shock, sorrow and anger over the move.

A group calling itself "Faithful Advocate" posted a May 23 press release on its website, announcing the formation of the group — comprised of "faithful working in consultation with canon lawyers" — as "an apostolate for the advocacy of the rights of the faithful in the Diocese of Charlotte." The newly launched organization has initiated an online petition asking Martin to "please reconsider this decision.

"At a minimum, we ask that you postpone its implementation until Rome provides additional clarity," said the petition. "We ask that you allow space for conversation with the faithful who have been deeply impacted, and who have experienced real spiritual fruit through the Traditional Latin Mass."

According to the Catholic News Herald, the diocese's Construction and Real Estate Office is carrying out a $700,000 renovation of the church building to serve as the new chapel. Upgrades include a new ceiling, flooring, lighting, refitting the sanctuary for Catholic worship, installing pews with kneelers, adding a second restroom, and repainting the entire space.

The Catholic News Herald reported that the Mooresville chapel is considered a geographically strategic location because it lies between the Charlotte Diocese's two largest population centers: Charlotte and the Triad region of the cities of Greensboro, Winston-Salem and High Point. The outlet also noted the requirements of *Traditionis Custodes* prevent the TLM from being celebrated in a parish, and so the Mooresville chapel was the only location involving an existing church building owned by the diocese that met the criteria.

Martin said his decree completed the diocese's implementation of *Traditionis Custodes*. That 2021 apostolic letter reversed Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 apostolic letter *Summorum Pontificum* that had allowed wide permissions for diocesan priests to celebrate Masses with the 1962 Roman Missal.

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Pope Benedict had framed the decision as one that would foster the church's unity by pastorally providing for Catholics attached to the older usage (or "*usus antiquior*") and help enrich the celebration of the 2002 Roman Missal as the "ordinary usage" of the Mass.

Pope Francis, however, rolled those permissions back over concerns the older celebration of Mass was being abused to harm the church's "ecclesial communion," including undermining the authority of Vatican II and the post-conciliar reform of the Roman rite. He declared the liturgical books promulgated by St. Paul VI and St. John Paul II following Vatican II are "the unique expression of the '*lex orandi*' ('law of worship') of the Roman rite."

The Vatican published additional instructions in February 2023 clarifying that priests ordained after the publication of *Traditionis Custodes* must receive direct permission from the Vatican to celebrate Mass with the 1962 missal. Bishops also may not establish personal parishes for Catholics attached to the older form of the Roman rite, or allow its celebrations in parish churches.

In 2023, Jugis had called for "a smooth and orderly transition to the new course charted by *Traditionis Custodes* to promote unity. He discontinued TLMs at five parishes with smaller numbers of participants. Four other parishes, which drew greater numbers of faithful to the TLM, were granted a temporary extension by the Vatican's Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments.

The extension expires this year, Martin noted in his May 23 decree.