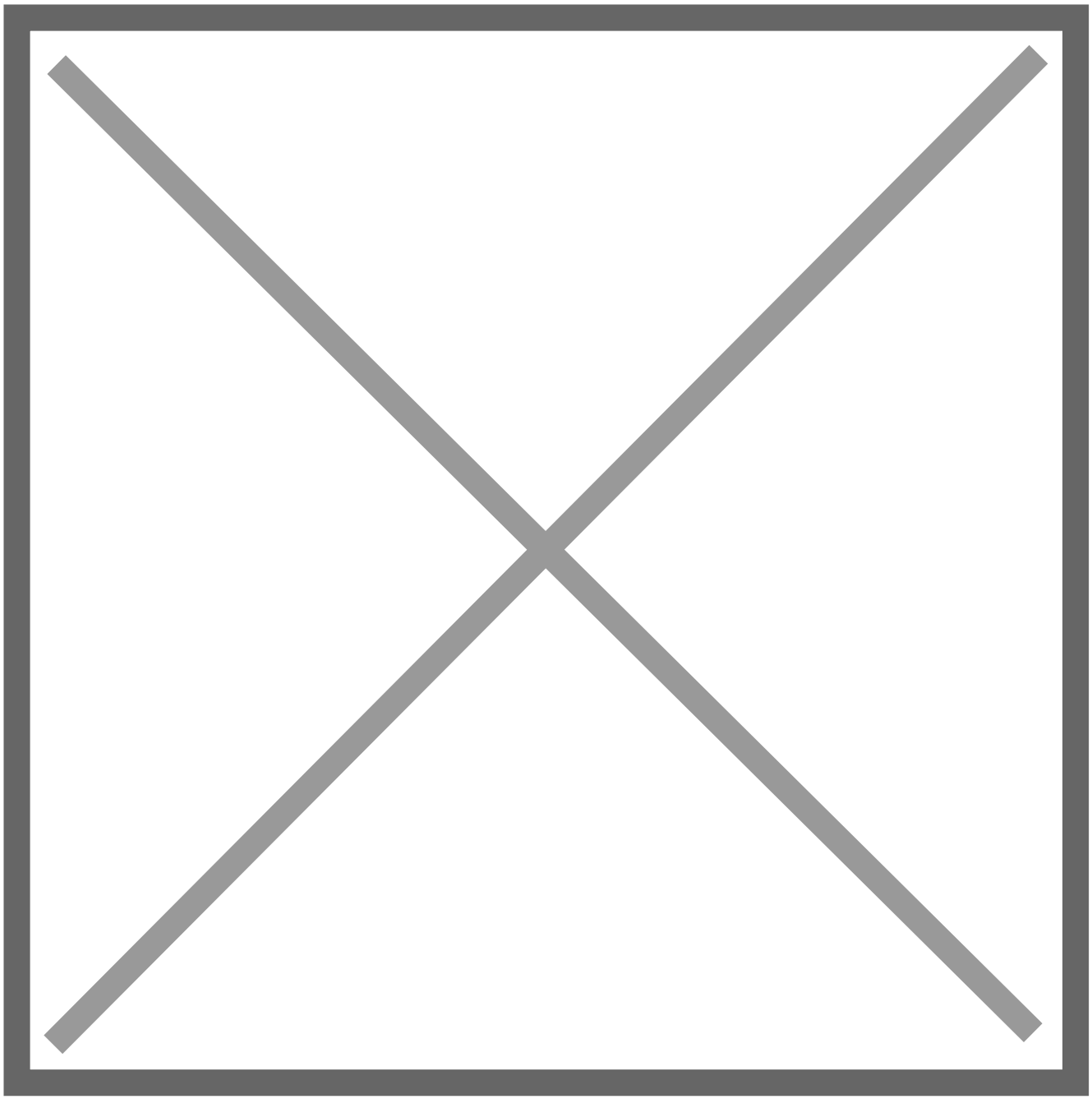
News



Fr. James Miara, pastor of Holy Innocents Church in New York City, delivers his homily as he celebrates a traditional Latin Mass at Holy Innocents July 13, 2025. The Archdiocese of New York parish offers the Latin Mass daily, including two times on Sunday. (OSV News/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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London — February 16, 2026
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Supporters of the traditional Latin Mass have urged Catholics not to confuse their movement with the more controversial Society of St. Pius X, commonly referred to as SSPX, whose leaders currently risk excommunication by threatening to ordain their own bishops.

"We've waited patiently for Pope Leo to consider relaxing Latin Mass restrictions — the SSPX has now thrown a hand grenade into this," said Joseph Shaw, chairman of the London-based Latin Mass Society, part of an international network of traditionalist groups.

"We've absolutely no influence over their reasoning and timing, and their approach is completely separate. But we risk being lumped together by people who don't care one way or the other."

The lay Catholic spoke during a packed Feb. 12 symposium on liturgical renewal at London's Oratory Church, founded in the 1880s by St. John Henry Newman.

The meeting coincided with Vatican talks between Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, prefect of the Dicastery for Doctrine of the Faith, and Fr. Davide Pagliarani, superior general of the SSPX, which announced plans Feb. 2 to appoint bishops without a papal mandate.

In an OSV News interview, Shaw said he still hoped for some "quiet and subtle, but rapid" concession on the traditional Mass by Pope Leo XIV, but feared the SSPX's move would harden attitudes among some bishops and cardinals, who could now view all Latin Mass enthusiasts as "tainted with disapproval."

Meanwhile, similar fears were expressed by a senior Dominican theologian, who said he hoped the SSPX's threatened move might nevertheless provide a "new momentum" for resolving disagreements.

"The SSPX are not schismatics — they pray for the pope, and we should represent their position fairly," Fr. Dominic White, prior of Blackfriars in Oxford, told OSV News.

"However, they have issues with the Second Vatican Council, and there's a danger other Latin Mass supporters will be confused with them."

Founded in 1970 by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, the SSPX celebrates the traditional Latin, or Tridentine, Mass predating Vatican II (1962-1965), but also rejects the council's liturgical changes and approaches to ecumenism and religious freedom.

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The society's planned July 1 consecrations echo a 1988 crisis when Lefebvre appointed four bishops without papal approval and was declared excommunicated by St. John Paul II.

Other Catholics worldwide also support the traditional Mass, however, and expressed sadness when it was curbed by Pope Francis in a July 2021 apostolic letter, *Traditionis Custodes*.

Some commentators have accused Latin Mass enthusiasts of using the traditional form to rally against wider Church changes, and say choosing Latin in place of the new Mass, or *Novus Ordo Missae*, is insensitive and divisive.

However, multiple statements and petitions have called for the restrictions to be relaxed, including a July 2024 letter by British public figures.

Shaw told OSV News hopes for an easing of curbs had risen last October, when a traditional Mass was celebrated with papal permission in St. Peter's Basilica by U.S. Cardinal Raymond Burke, formerly prefect of the Vatican's Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signature.

He added that there had since been disappointment over a document on liturgy presented by Cardinal Arthur Roche, British prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, to a Jan. 7-8 cardinals' extraordinary consistory, which had "merely restated the official position" set out in Traditionis Custodes.

"Far from responding to concerns, it contained arguments we've heard repeatedly and answered repeatedly," the Latin Mass Society's Shaw told OSV News.

"I'm sure the pope can see the difference between the SSPX and other Latin Mass groups. But he may also be persuaded that the SSPX are heading into schism anyway, and should now be swept out of the Church along with everyone else who likes the Latin Mass."

The London symposium launched a book, "Towards a Theology of Liturgical Renewal," containing Catholic "views from the pews" about the Mass with reflections by theologians.

In a book preface, White said he regretted "arguments about liturgy" had "run through families and friendships," as well as "parishes and dioceses."

He added that many Catholics believed the restrictions imposed by *Traditionis Custodes* had "discredited the synodal process" initiated by Pope Francis, and said it was now essential to listen to "ordinary Catholics," not just to "noisy people and expert liturgists."

In his OSV News interview, Shaw said Eastern-rite Catholics and former Anglicans had been permitted their own rites and ordinariates, and had not faced the same "demand for uniformity" imposed on Latin Mass enthusiasts.

He added that many Catholics wanted "simply to be left alone," and were unable to understand the "strange, aggressive and unchristian campaign" against the Latin

Mass.

"We're not looking for any kind of victory, just to be allowed to remain a tiny part of the Church, contributing in our own way," said the Latin Mass Society chairman, an Oxford University philosophy professor.

"From my weekly dealings with our bishops, however, I haven't sadly detected any softening in official positions."

Meanwhile, White said moves to "weaponize liturgy" have been made in the past by Marxist-leaning groups and were now being tried by some "far-right traditionalists," who viewed the Latin Mass as "part of a whole agenda and worldview."

He added, however, that most enthusiasts viewed the traditional Mass as a deep source of spiritual community, fully compatible with modern Catholic renewal, and said his own Dominican order had traditionally been drawn to "those on the margins" who "needed to be heard."

"I've noticed the significant influence the traditional Mass has on many young Catholics, including those training for the priesthood. And while I wouldn't see it as the only way forward, it's clearly a place of growth in the Church, and it would be alienating and divisive to close it down," the Dominican priest told OSV News.

"Catholic teaching and tradition have been founded on debate within the Church, in which the Holy Spirit has been present — when positions are taken in some postmodern way, in silos, and people are unwilling to listen, this is neither Catholic nor charitable. If the Church is truly universal, it should provide room for variation."