



DIOCESE *of* LACROSSE
OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

July 21, 2026

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On July 1, 2026, bishops of the Society of St. Pius X (SSPX) consecrated four priests as bishops without a pontifical mandate and against the expressed will of the Holy Father. The Society has long existed in an irregular canonical situation, and its ministers do not exercise legitimate ministry in the Catholic Church.

In response, on July 2, 2026, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, issued a decree declaring that the bishops who performed the consecrations and those who received them had committed schismatic acts and had incurred automatic excommunication. Furthermore, the Dicastery declared that the sacred ministers of the Society are now considered to be in schism and are therefore subject to the excommunication established by canon law. While a strong penalty, it must always be remembered that excommunication is not intended to be permanent but is a charitable call to repentance and reconciliation.

The present matter is not about the celebration of the Mass or the sacraments according to the liturgical books in use prior to the Second Vatican Council. Rather, the primary issue is the unity of the Catholic Church under the primacy of the Holy Father and the College of Bishops in union with him. Through episcopal ordination itself, bishops receive the office of sanctifying, teaching, and governing the People of God. By their nature, however, these responsibilities can only be exercised in communion with the Holy Father and the College of Bishops. By proceeding with these episcopal consecrations without a pontifical mandate, the leadership of the Society committed a schismatic act, thereby leading the Society into schism, which the Church describes as the refusal of submission to the Holy Father. This is a sorrowful moment for the whole Church, and I share that sorrow with you. Whenever there is division in the Church, the entire body of Christ is affected. "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Cor 12:26).

I write to you today because this decision by the Society's leadership has consequences for the faithful of our diocese, especially for those who have worshipped at Our Lady of Victory Chapel in Necedah, whether exclusively or occasionally. As your bishop, I wish to offer both clarity and reassurance so that no member of the faithful is left uncertain about his or her place within the communion of the Church. While Pope Francis granted certain concessions permitting priests of the Society to validly absolve sins and, with the permission of the diocesan bishop, to assist at marriages, those concessions have been revoked following the events of July 1, 2026, and can no longer be exercised. This change is significant because the valid celebration of the Sacrament of Penance and the valid assistance of a priest at marriage require faculties granted by legitimate ecclesiastical authority. Since those faculties have now been withdrawn, priests of the Society no longer possess the authority necessary to celebrate these sacraments validly.

To state these consequences plainly, the Apostolic See has declared that the clerics of the Society now administer the sacraments illicitly, and that the Sacrament of Penance administered by them and the marriages at which they assist are invalid. Anyone with questions about a marriage already celebrated, or about any particular pastoral situation, is welcome to contact the Chancery or the Tribunal for clarification.

At the same time, I wish to reassure those who have previously received these sacraments from priests of the Society. Marriages celebrated with my permission before July 1, 2026, remain valid, and confessions heard under the faculties granted by Pope Francis were likewise valid. In accordance with the explicit directive of the Apostolic See, however, such permissions and faculties can no longer be granted, and priests of the Society can no longer validly absolve sins or validly assist at marriages.

Furthermore, to those who have attended the liturgies of the Society of St. Pius X, let me also offer a word of reassurance. For the laity, the Apostolic See itself has made clear that this excommunication applies only to those who formally adhere to the Society under the conditions established by the Apostolic See, knowingly and freely embracing the schism and outwardly manifesting that choice, not on those who have attended these liturgies simply out of love for the sacred liturgy, and who have never rejected the Holy Father or the teaching of the Church. Accordingly, knowing the situation as it now stands, I ask all the faithful to remain steadfast in communion with the Roman Pontiff, with the bishops in communion with him, and with the whole Church, and to refrain from taking part in celebrations and activities promoted by the Society of St. Pius X. I therefore ask those who have worshipped at Our Lady of Victory Chapel to begin participating in the life of a parish in full communion with the Catholic Church. Communion with the Successor of Peter belongs to the very nature of Christ's Church, and I ask you to place your trust in Christ, who never abandons those who seek to remain in full communion with His Church.

Furthermore, I would remind the faithful that the Mass celebrated according to the 1962 Missal is offered in full communion with the Church at the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, at Cor Jesu Oratory near Boyd, and at St. Mary's Oratory in Wausau, where the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest offers the traditional Latin Mass and sacraments each day.

Finally, to all who have been affected by these events, I entreat you to seek the counsel of priests of the diocese as you discern the Lord's call to abide in communion with Peter and the Church Christ founded. To any priest of the Society who is weighing what these events mean for his priesthood, know that the Holy See has established a path for your reconciliation, and that I will receive any such request with what the Holy See itself has asked of me: through listening and cordial availability, remaining especially mindful of the human and spiritual weight such a decision carries.

Successive Roman Pontiffs, St. John Paul II, Benedict XVI, Francis, and now Leo XIV, have labored for decades toward the full reconciliation of the Society. Those decades of patient labor have now been gravely wounded by the acts of July 1, but the Church does not stop praying for unity, because Christ Himself prayed for it on the night before He died, that they may all be one (John 17:20-23). Please pray for those who are hurt or confused by these recent events. Pray for the clergy and lay faithful of the Society, that they may seek reconciliation with Christ and His Church. And pray for unity among all Christians, beginning here in our own diocese.

I entrust all those affected by this moment to the intercession of Mary, Mother of the Church, and I assure you of my prayers,

Sincerely in Christ,

✠ Most Reverend Gerard W. Battersby
Bishop of La Crosse