

# ST. MARY & ST. JOSEPH ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Sunday, May 21, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As you know, our diocese is facing a declining number of priests and parishioners. For example, Warren once had six Catholic grade schools, a Catholic high school, and seven parishes with one or more priests at each plus permanent deacons. Today we have one K-12 school with two campuses and three parishes served by one pastor, one parochial vicar, and two permanent deacons. Aligning schedules and programs to this reality continues to call us to sacrifice. Although these changes are difficult, I know that working together will make our parishes stronger.

Coordinating the Mass schedules is a key facet of collaboration. Earlier this month, we implemented the revised schedule for weekday Masses. On June 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>, we will implement a new schedule of five weekend Masses.

**Rationale:**

- The number of Masses at each parish is based on Mass attendance data, the seating capacity of the churches, and the number of registered households at each parish. Blessed Sacrament (BSP) and St. Mary and St. Joseph (SMJ) will have two Masses each and St. Elizabeth Ann Seton (Seton) will have one.
- The Mass times were guided by attendance data, input from the parish councils and parishioners, and the plan for Sunday morning CCD (see below).
- Each parish will receive its top choice for one Mass time: 4 PM Saturday at BSP, 4 PM Saturday at SMJ, and 10 AM Sunday at Seton.
- The 8:30 AM and 11:30 AM Masses are spaced to enable CCD families to attend Mass either before or after class at SMJ or BSP.

Day	Time & Location
Saturday	4 PM SMJ
Saturday	4 PM BSP
Sunday	8:30 AM SMJ
Sunday	10 AM Seton
Sunday	11:30 AM BSP
CCD	10 - 11:20 BSP

I considered the pros and cons of over 30 variations before settling on this schedule. I know this will make some parishioners unhappy; however, I ask you to consider a lesson learned from recent experience. Last year, BSP and Seton consolidated the number of weekend Masses from five to three. Since then, each Mass has been more full, which has led to a more positive experience of going to church. The change was hard, but it has led to an increase of momentum in the communities. I believe this schedule will have the same effect.

Religious education is another area for collaboration. I am proposing weekly CCD classes on Sundays from 10:00 to 11:20 AM at BSP. Youth and young adult ministry, adult faith formation, and the family life apostolate will utilize all three campuses. Baptism and First Holy Communion liturgies will be held at the child's home parish and Confirmation will likely be at St. Columba Cathedral.

Rationale:

- Each parish has a small number of CCD participants in grades K to 8: BSP: 44 students and 8 catechists, SMJ: 16 students and 3 catechists, Seton: 24 students and 1 catechist.
- All three parishes should benefit from the programs led by our sisters, the Parish Visitors of Mary Immaculate. SMJ does not currently employ pastoral staff for religious education.
- Sister Mary Beata, the Director of Religious Education, will coordinate:
  - Sacramental Preparation classes (Baptism, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation)
  - CCD (grades K-8)
  - Adult Faith Formation Programs
  - R.C.I.A (formation for adult converts)
- Sister Debra Marie, the Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry, will coordinate:
  - Youth Ministry (grades 9-12)
  - Young Adult Ministry (ages 18-39)
  - The Family Life Apostolate (activities for families with young children)
  - Door to Door Visitation

I am sorry to present so much information and change at one time. Honestly, I had hoped to address religious education later in the year. However, I think it is best to give you the whole picture now for your understanding and to move towards healing. Please know that my door is open to those who would like to discuss this. I am praying for our parishes every day, especially St. Mary and St. Joseph. Please pray for me as well. I look to the future with hope and excitement for the good work we can do together.

Yours in Christ,

Fr. Cicero  
Pastor