



SAINT THOMAS the APOSTLE

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Dear Parishioners,

It has been almost two years since we first came together as St. Thomas the Apostle Parish, and many decisions have had to be made along the way to strengthen our parish family. As we continue planning for the future of St. Thomas the Apostle, we are reminded that the goal of *On Mission for the Church Alive!* and of all our planning efforts is to create a vibrant, sustainable parish community filled with mission and ministry. We've spent the last several months listening to the feedback obtained from you during the nine informal sessions that were held at each of our campuses. The overwhelming opinion of those present was two-fold; 1. We need to make changes in order to continue to grow as a parish, 2. We need to maintain a Catholic presence in Duquesne. In order to continue to move toward this goal, we find it necessary to make some changes.

After a careful review of church seating capacity, available clergy, Mass attendance trends and finances, the following new Mass Schedule has been created and will become effective the weekend of June 4-5, 2022.

Day	Time	Location
Saturday	4:00 PM	Holy Trinity
Saturday	4:00 PM	St. Therese
Sunday	7:30 AM	St. Therese
Sunday	8:30 AM	St. Joseph
Sunday	9:00 AM	St. Agnes
Sunday	10:00 AM	St. Rita
Sunday	10:30 AM	St. Maximilian Kolbe
Sunday	11:15 AM	St. Therese

One thing that we learned from our attendance analysis is that the parish as a whole has been heavily affected by the COVID 19 pandemic. We remain hopeful that our weekend Mass attendance will rebound once the pandemic ends. The Mass schedule listed above keeps the door open for not only a rebound in weekly attendance but also for growth.

At this time, no church buildings are being closed. While two churches will not be used for regular Sunday worship, those churches are still available for baptisms, weddings, funerals and other special occasions such as feast days.

God Bless,

Fr. Dan

To help parishioners better understand the need for these changes, the following list of Questions and Answers has been developed:

Why do we have to change the Mass Schedule?

In order to create a vibrant, sustainable parish, our responsibility and desire is to bring people closer together in union with the Eucharist as a community of faith. Our current Mass schedule presents challenges in supporting this effort. From January – March 2022, the weekend Mass attendance has been 1,359 for the entire parish spread out over 12 Masses. The total seating capacity of our 8 churches is 3,412 which means Mass attendance has been less than half the seating capacity of all of our 8 churches. The total attendance for all of our Easter Masses was 2,276, but still less than pre-pandemic Mass attendance of just over 2,700. Even with the increased attendance at Easter, there were still many empty seats throughout our 8 churches.

After careful consideration of current Mass attendance combined with the seating capacities of our churches, declining demographics, clergy assignments, and parish finances, the new Mass schedule has been created based upon the needs of the entire parish. The new schedule with fewer weekend Masses will allow for more vibrant liturgies with more people in attendance at each of the Masses. Again, it is always our goal to bring people closer together as a community of faith, and the celebration of Mass with fuller churches helps us do that by providing a more vibrant sacramental experience for parishioners.

How did you determine what buildings to be used?

Along with prayerful discernment and careful review, I looked at the following criteria to determine Mass times and churches:

- *Strategic location within the parish*
- *Anchors for the parish*
- *Accessibility*
- *Community presence*
- *Catechetical needs and considerations of families and students*

If we can use certain church buildings for funerals, weddings, and baptisms, why can't we just have one Mass on Sunday as well?

Our desire is to do all that we can to be present to the members of our parish family especially in times of death, as well as special occasions like weddings and baptisms. But the bigger picture continues to be focused on how to best bring our parish family closer together by celebrating Masses with fuller churches. While we may not be able to utilize some of our church buildings in the way we have been, we will in no way minimize the presence of the Church in our neighborhoods. Our goal is to be able to be even more present – with needed

ministry, programs and personnel – that can enhance our ministry to the elderly and homebound, evangelize those who no longer come to Church, work with our youth and young adults, and serve those with economic needs.

How do Clergy Assignments impact the Mass Schedule?

While we are blessed with a wonderful, dedicated clergy team at St. Thomas the Apostle parish, we must be mindful of Canon Law and Diocesan guidelines in place to ensure the health and well-being of our priests. Canon law, the governing law of the church, states that priests are not to celebrate more than two Masses per day. Diocesan guidelines, established at the beginning of the On-Mission process, direct that a parish's weekend Mass schedule may include no more than three Masses for each priest assigned to the parish. There may be exceptions to this, but only when grave needs arise. The new Mass schedule considers the ministry which our resident retired priests offer, but also allows, in time of need, that our two assigned priests will be able to celebrate all of the scheduled Masses.

By assignment from Bishop Zubik, Fr. Dan Sweeney is our Pastor, and Fr. Tony Gargotta is our Senior Parochial Vicar. We are both assigned and dedicated to the pastoral and sacramental needs of the parish on a full-time basis. Fr. Nick Mastrangelo and Fr. Stan Gregorek reside at the parish in retirement. Priest-student Fr. Augustus Nweze, also resides in the parish while providing ministry to patients in the Oakland area hospitals, including celebrating Mass there on the weekends. While we are grateful for our retired and student priests and their gifts of ministry and willingness to serve, we are better aligning our mass schedule with diocesan guidelines. At the same time, we are also preparing for future realities realizing that the number of priests available for full time ministry continues to decline throughout the diocese.

Why were Holy Name and Resurrection Churches omitted from the schedule?

The Mass attendance does not warrant the use of 3 large churches. St. Therese Church seats 700 and is sufficient for special occasions and holiday services. The decision is based on the data collected from parish records and input from the Task Force.

What does this mean for the future?

Due to our challenging financial situation, demographics, aging population, significant decline in Mass attendance and offertory, along with our need to provide for the care of souls in our parish community, we will continue to assess current realities and consider next steps related to all parish properties.

Why is this so hard?

We acknowledge that our church buildings are sacred spaces that serve our sacramental life. They are places where the human and divine meet. Please know that the decisions being made about the changing Mass schedule and use of our churches are taking into consideration the rather grave circumstances we are facing. These decisions are never easy and weigh heavy on the hearts of all. However, in order to sustain our parish for the future and maintain a presence of the Church in our region, critical decisions are necessary. Finally, as difficult as this may be, let us remember that Church (The Body of Christ) is more than a church building. We are disciples of Lord Jesus, giving witness to faith and seeking the salvation of souls, our own and others. During this time of change, let us join together in prayer for ourselves and one another as we continue to celebrate our faith and partake in the graces and gifts of the Holy Eucharist.

What about Mass intentions that we already scheduled?

- Mass Intentions that are already scheduled will be handled as follows:
- Mass Intentions scheduled for Resurrection will be moved to St. Rita
- Mass Intentions scheduled for the Saturday 5:30 p.m. Mass at Holy Name will be moved to Holy Trinity.
- Mass Intentions scheduled for Sunday 11:30 a.m. Mass at Holy Name will be moved to St. Joseph.
- Mass Intentions scheduled for Saturday 4:00 p.m. at St. Max will be moved to the Sunday 10:30 a.m. Mass at St. Max

Please note that some Masses will have two intentions. Due to the significant number of Mass requests for St. Therese, there will be two intentions at some of those Masses as well.

Please check in with the ushers before Mass to let them know that you will be able to take up the gifts.

What about sanctuary candles that have special intentions?

Remember that no church is closing. The Blessed Sacrament will still be present in all of the churches, so a sanctuary candle will remain lit because the true presence of Christ is still in the church. We will continue to accept sanctuary candle requests for all 8 churches.

Why can't we have daily Mass at the churches with no Sunday Mass?

The daily Mass schedule was built around the churches where clergy live. After 6 months, the daily Mass schedule is working with 2 Masses. Attendance has not dropped, so the daily Mass schedule will remain with the exception of Friday. The Friday Mass schedule will be 8:00 AM at St. Max and 9:00 AM at St. Therese. This change is being made to accommodate the school schedule.