



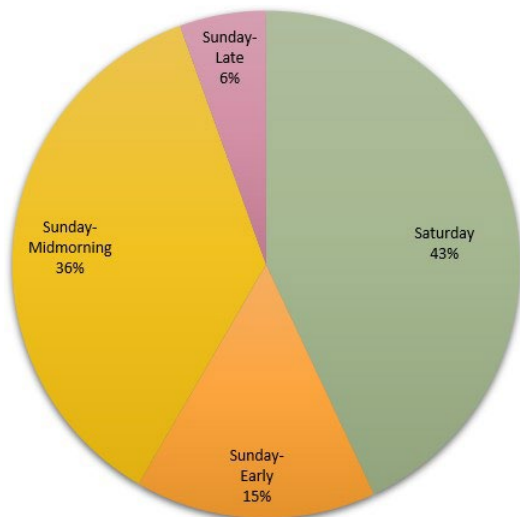
My dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

We are living in a time of great uncertainty. The rapid turnover of priests and pastors you experienced in recent years, the pending naming of a new Bishop, parish consolidation across the Diocese, and the closing of churches has led some to fear “we could lose that which we love”.

The fact is things are going to change in the future, there is no avoiding it. What will those changes look like? First and foremost, we are not going to have as many priests to serve in our parishes as we have now. Due to retirement and severe medical issues, I expect that we will shrink from 42 to 32 parish priests in the next 5 years. Additionally, the number of healthy retired priests has regressed to the point where it is no longer a given we can find coverage for Masses when the need arises.

On the positive side, I do not foresee any changes effecting the number of priests assigned to Mater Dei parish or that either of us would be moved. On the negative side, it could happen that we will need to reduce the number of Sunday Masses celebrated from 6 to 5, or even from 5 to 4. There is nothing happening right now, but we need to have options in place if the necessity arises.

Regarding our parish Mass Schedule, there are 2 over-riding concerns that need to be addressed. First, if it should come to pass that one of our priests is not able to celebrate Mass and coverage cannot be found, that our schedule would enable the other priest to cover all our Masses without having to cancel any of them. Second, that if the need should arise that we have to move from 6 to 5 or 5 to 4, we can do so by dropping a Mass without having to redo the entire schedule. With those two concerns in mind, here are the results of our Mass times survey:



<u>Time frames:</u>	<u>% of votes</u>
Saturday 4:00-6:30 PM	43 %
Sunday - Early 7:30-8:30 AM	15 %
Sunday - Mid 9:00-11:30 AM	36 %
Sunday - Late 6:00-7:00 AM	6 %

Taking all that into account, and after much debate and discussion, beginning the weekend of January 7-8, 2023, this is what our new Mass schedule will be:

Saturday:

4:00 PM Mass at Nativity Church

5:30 PM Mass at Immaculate Conception Church

Sunday:

7:30 AM Mass at Nativity Church

9:00 AM Mass at Nativity Church

10:30 AM Mass at Immaculate Conception Church

7:00 PM Mass at Immaculate Conception Church

I know to change Mass times is never popular. If the Mass you currently attend is one of the times or locations being changed, I apologize and ask for your understanding, especially if you are one of our volunteers who cantor, lector, usher, an EMHC, or a server. Please be as generous as possible in your giving of your time and talent going forward as we cannot reverently celebrate Mass without your help.

I mentioned the fear “we could lose that which we love” is being felt by some of our parishioners, and these changes could reinforce those feelings. I would point out we still have Masses at convenient times and in church buildings that are in good condition. There are a lot of communities across our diocese who are unable to say the same. So please, as best as you can, keep in mind how blessed we still are.

Fr. Mark and I are dedicated to serving you and your families, but some things are out of our control. By making these changes to our Mass times now, we hope to minimize the changes that are sure to come in the future. Thank you for your faithfulness, thank you for your understanding, and most of all, thank you for your active participation in the life of our parish.

Sincerely yours in Christ our Lord,

Fr. Bradley C. Pelzel

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