

December 12/13, 2009

Dear Parishioners of St. Mary/St. Frances Cabrini,

The insert you received in last week's bulletin was entitled Changing Parish Demographics. Under the section "Number of Priests" it noted that by 2000 there was one priest for every 1,342 Catholics. We are about 1500 Catholics in our parish. Under the section "Number of Parishes" it noted that by 2000 the number of Catholics per parish had reached 3,112. We are about half of that as a parish. Under "Trends" it noted that only 20% of Catholics in their twenties and thirties say they attend Mass weekly or bi-weekly. They are less likely to attend Mass out of habit but still identify themselves strongly as Catholic.

These demographics reflect our area to some degree. The following shows you the demographic shift that has taken place here from 1989 to 2009 in three fiscal years:

	Fiscal Years (July 1 – June 30)		
	1989/90	1994/95	2008/09
Average number at Mass (Easter time):	2410	1411	525
Baptisms:	70	63	13
Marriages:	18	23	7
Deaths:	38	49	37

The above demographic changes are indicators of the decline in population that is going on around us and impacting the attendance at Mass. I want to remind you of the following. In early September, 2009 I reported that during the months of January to March, 2009 the average attendance dropped for all the Masses: Saturday 5 pm Vigil averaged 152 people; Sunday 11 am averaged 182 people; and Sunday 8 am averaged 72 people. Keep in mind both churches can hold nearly 300 people. Currently the attendance at the 8 am Mass has hovered between 95 and 100 people. The 1998 Diocesan Guidelines for Scheduling Masses recommends that "when the church is less than half-filled for one or more Sunday Masses, parishes are encouraged to readjust the Mass schedule, even if this means scheduling only one Sunday Mass." The Worship Committee recommended the 8 am Mass be dropped from October to March due to the small numbers attending during the fall and winter months.

Taking into consideration the above information, the 8 a.m. Mass will be discontinued during the months of January to March and will resume again in April. During these winter months parishioners will have the option for Mass at St. Mary Church for the 4 pm Vigil Mass or at St. Frances Cabrini Church for the 11 am Sunday Mass.

The inserts you receive with this letter are entitled "Coping with Change" and "Grieving Mindfully." I encourage you to spend some time reading and reflecting on these two articles. Yes, we are facing some change now and I anticipate there will be other changes that will come out of the conversations we will have in the New Year.

As we enter into these conversations and are honest with ourselves about the realities taking place around us in regards to the demographic and social changes in our community, we will emerge a stronger, more vital parish than we are now. Diminishing numbers do not mean we will have a diminished spirit; on the contrary, the vitality of the parish will depend more on each one's involvement with the parish, more so than in the past. A new spirit and new life will emerge that will show us our best years are yet to be.

We need to remind ourselves that all this is to be God's agenda and not ours. On our part, we are to pray and discern what God is calling us to for the future insofar as building up the Body of Christ, the Church. How we get to that future will depend on where God leads us and our own willingness to trust God.

As I said last week, Advent is a season of surprises and living in anticipation of what is to come with the birth of Jesus and the coming of God's Kingdom. The unfolding of our parish's future is a part of that same anticipation.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Raymond J. Thomas". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent initial "R".

Reverend Raymond J. Thomas, VF
Pastor