

September 6, 2009

Dear Members of St. Mary/St. Frances Cabrini Parish,

I am writing concerning Mass attendance and the Mass schedule for our parish. Earlier this summer both at the June 30 Pastoral Planning Council (PPC) meeting and the August 11 Worship meeting there was conversation concerning the number of people at each of the weekend Masses and scheduling of Masses.

Looking at the average attendance figures on the reverse side of this letter you see at the very top the total average attendance dropping from 745 in 2005 to 581 in 2007. In the main body you see the current averages of each Mass for 2008-2009: 150 for 5 pm, 105 for 8 am, and 186 for 11 am, excluding the Christmas and Easter numbers.

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." Both St. Mary and St. Frances Cabrini Churches are able to seat close to 375 people.

During the months of January to March the attendance averages drop for all the Masses. From September to March the 8 am Mass dropped below 100 except for the month of November.

In reviewing these numbers, the Worship Committee recommended the 8 am Mass be dropped from October to March and begin again from April to September. The PPC recommended rescheduling the Sunday 8 am Mass to 8:30 am to see if the numbers would increase. The diocesan evaluator of the parish audit in reviewing our Masses and attendance numbers also recommended dropping the 8 am Mass during the winter months. (See Evaluator Comments on the parish webpage under the Mission Statement section).

Recently I also received a recommendation from a parishioner speaking on behalf of our elder members to move the 5 pm Saturday Vigil Mass to 4 pm in the winter months when the days become shorter and there is less daylight for driving to Mass. Both the Worship Committee and the PPC concurred along with various members of the parish with whom I shared this idea.

Taking all of these matters into consideration, beginning this October when the Saturday Vigil Mass moves to St. Mary Church, I will follow the general recommendation of changing the time of the Saturday Vigil Mass to 4 pm for the fall/winter months until it moves back to St. Frances Cabrini Church in April. At that time the Mass will again be 5 pm for the spring/summer months. As regards the 8 am Mass, during the next two months I would like each of us to do two things: first, give prayerful consideration concerning the 8 am Mass during the months of January through March and secondly, continue the conversation with me, other parishioners, and/or the members of the PPC and Worship Committee whose names are listed on the bulletin board in each church. By early November I will have met with the PPC and Worship Committee to make a decision regarding the 8 am Mass for January through March.

Change is always difficult, but I ask you to prayerfully give these matters your consideration. May we continue to move forward under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Reverend Raymond J. Thomas, VF
Pastor