

June 14, 2024

Dear parishioners of Mary, Queen of Peace, Our Lady of Sorrows, and St. Joseph,

Thank you for your participation these past two weeks in a survey to help me in my discernment of a new Sunday Mass schedule for our Family 28. Over nine days, there were 876 responses, which is incredible. This tells me how dedicated you are to your community, how passionate you are about the Sunday Eucharist as a central pillar in your life, and how committed you are to our mutual work together of growing as disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not take this decision lightly, and I know and understand how impactful it is in your individual lives, and in these communities.

As I indicated in my previous letter, the survey was not a vote, but a way to get an understanding of Mass attendance preferences and possible shifts. I spent six or seven hours on Monday and Tuesday poring over the data, although I admittedly peaked at it a few times last week, too. I then spent some time in the chapel with it as well, weighing it all, including my prior consultation with the pastors and parish leadership, to come to my final decision. I consulted with the deanery priests of the region on Wednesday. And on Thursday I submitted my final proposal to the Office of the Vicar for Clergy for approval, which was received.

Starting the weekend of July 6/7, the new Sunday Mass schedule will be as follows:

Parish	New Schedule
Mary Queen of Peace	<b>5PM Vigil</b> <b>9AM</b> <b>11AM</b>
Our Lady of Sorrows	5PM Vigil 1PM
St. Joseph	8:30AM 10:30AM <b>5PM</b>
<b>Bold = Priest 1, Regular Font = Priest 2</b>	

Before the pandemic, there were 13 Masses between these three parishes. We are now going from nine to eight. I know these changes, past and present, are not easy or simple. Thank you for continuing to choose Jesus, the presence of God with us in the Eucharist, He who is the center of our community and life together.

To make the Sunday schedule possible for Fr. Kyle Poje and myself to celebrate, one Mass will be eliminated (St. Joseph), and three will be changed (two at St. Joseph, one at Our Lady of Sorrows).

Over the next few weeks, the pastors and staff at the parishes will be reaching out to volunteers to plan for implementing this new schedule.

Additionally, here is the new daily Mass Schedule, which has been adjusted from 13 to 9 Masses, and I hope that people will take advantage of this opportunity for more time in prayer and worship, and greater nourishment in Christ, no matter their individual parish. This schedule will begin on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, with no Masses on July 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> as we priests spend time moving. Other information about an updated Confessions schedule, and timing for Adoration, will be coming out next week.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Mary Queen of Peace	9AM		6PM	9AM	9AM	9AM
Our Lady of Sorrows				9AM*		
St. Joseph		6PM	9AM*		9AM	
<i>* School Mass, also open to others. Occasional Friday All School Mass in Issaquah</i>						

There were a number of things that factored into my discernment of the Sunday Mass times. The biggest is that as a priest, I want to be able to spend time with parishioners. So the schedule needs to allow us time to be present before and after Mass, as well as time for those longer Masses during the year, and travel time.

Looking at the survey, the first thing I did was to create two separate sets of results for each option – one based on respondents, and another with the household counts. This also allowed me to get a gauge of response rate by Mass time. The 876 responses represent 2,183 people – which is about how many people we have going to Mass each week in the three parishes. The lowest Mass had about a 60% participation rate, and the highest 165%. Part of the reason for this is people who attend Mass occasionally, which are missed in the averaged Mass Counts. I know there are probably a few duplicate responses from some households, as well.

This also enables modeling for those who didn't respond. At the Mass time with 85% participation, for example, what are the other 15% likely to do? While these 44 people might not have responded, they will still be coming to Sunday Mass, it's just a question of which Mass, and what are the potential total Mass counts for each option accordingly?

Next I looked at the raw data to understand movement between parishes and Masses. There were a few special cases that deserved closer attention, as well. The Saturday Vigil at St. Joseph is being eliminated – how many will go to another vigil at another parish, or to another Mass at St. Joseph on Sunday? The 11AM Mass at Our Lady of Sorrows, which is going to have a bigger shift in time – when do they stay at Our Lady of Sorrows, at which Mass, or when do they go elsewhere? With the Sunday morning Masses at St. Joseph and Mary, Queen of Peace, how many are willing to shift a half an hour to the similar Mass time, vs how many would choose the other earlier or later Mass time because this 30-minute shift makes it no longer a desirable time for them?

Interestingly enough, there are currently 60 people from the surveys who attend a different church each week other than what they identify as their home parish, some of which will return to their home parish under the new times. Looking ahead, some people are planning on attending a different church even though their current Mass time isn't changing (60 people). All together, the three options showed parish shifts between 140-240 people based on the responses, which is not minor. The two major groups consist of those who simply like a new time elsewhere, and those who are attached to a particular time. Also, it's impossible to know, but how many say they are shifting to a Mass at another church, but based on that parish's counts/capacity constraints, might change their plans? Some options had a more even division of parishioners at some churches than others, and sometimes the split was so uneven the capacity constraints became a problem. There were other angles I considered as well in sifting through the information.

Each of the options had strengths and weaknesses, some greater than others. After two months of wrestling with this decision, I found peace with it on Tuesday evening. I pray for that gift for you, as well. I have been praying for you at Mass since January 24<sup>th</sup>. I look forward to joining you soon to celebrate together the Most Holy Eucharist, at perhaps a different time, or a different church – but the same Lord.

In Christ,  
Fr. Matthew Oakland