

July 17-18, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have been edified by the holiness and dedication of parishioners at both St. Mary's and St. Michael's. It's clear to me that so many of our faithful churchgoers love their Catholic faith. I love it too. I think you'll agree with me that passing on our faith in Jesus Christ to the next generation is vital.

Passing on the faith, forming our children and youth in a relationship with Christ, is in fact the work of religious education. In our parishes we have been blessed with parents, directors of religious education, teachers, helpers, and others who have been willing to give themselves generously to this important work. Like all ministries in our parishes, I think we need to make periodic assessments about how we're doing and change things around if necessary.

What I think is necessary at this time is that St. Mary's and St. Michael's carry out a combined religious education ministry. This does not mean that one parish is going to gobble up the other. In fact, this trend toward sharing religious education resources has been occurring throughout our diocese. It is important that religious education students have the best possible experience. We need to have sufficient people, resources, and time for the ministry to occur. This means we need to work together in this ministry.

I also believe that an effective religious education ministry needs to involve me as pastor. For reasons known only to him, the Lord has entrusted this portion of his flock to me and I need to attend to the needs of old and young alike, of those seasoned in Christian living and those starting out.

Up to this point in time, it has been difficult for me to have a direct connection with religious education ministry because all the classes at St. Michael's and half the classes at St. Mary's occurred when I was required to have Mass. The overlapping of Mass times with religious education class times has been repeatedly pointed out to me as a serious problem for both parishes.

So, in order to free me to have the time for the religious education of students and parents, and after hearing the advice of the Pastoral Councils of both parishes, I have decided to make a change in our weekend Mass schedule. Beginning the weekend of August 7 and 8, weekend Mass times will be as follows:

	St. Mary	St. Michael
Saturday	4:00 PM	5:00 PM
Sunday	7:30 AM	7:30 AM
Sunday	10:00 AM	10:00 AM
Sunday		11:30 AM

Religious education classes for all grade levels will take place on Sundays between the 7:30 AM and 10:00 AM Masses. This should allow religious education students along with their families the opportunity to attend Mass either before or after religious education sessions.

Classes will be made up of students from both parishes. At this moment, we are planning to have grades Pre-K through 3 meet at Holy Trinity Catholic School on the St. Michael's campus. Grades 4 through 9 will meet at St. Mary's School. Grades 10 and 11 will be at St. Michael's.

Confessions will continue to be held on Saturdays at 1:00 PM at St. Michael's and at 2:30 PM at St. Mary's. Because of the earlier start to Mass on Sundays, there will no longer be regularly scheduled confession on Sunday mornings at St. Michael's. However, I do hope to add extra time for confessions into the parish schedules of both parishes. Please be aware, too, that sometimes I have to adjust the schedule of confessions because of other parish functions such as weddings. I appreciate your understanding.

Thanks so much for taking the time to read this. I know that moving Mass times is always traumatic. Perhaps we can see it as a way of showing our commitment to our young people. By making this time available for them and their faith formation, we are all making an important sacrifice.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan E. Thomas". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

(Very Rev.) Alan E. Thomas
Pastor/Administrator