

Preparing for Change in the Wallingford Mass Schedule March 9, 2025

Dear Friends,

In November 2024, initial information was shared with The Church of the Resurrection and Most Holy Trinity Parish concerning creating a united parish family. That information sharing continues with this update, focused on a new Mass schedule. As you will see, there are many factors which need to be considered in this process; it's important that everyone is aware of the scope of the issues in preparation for the changes to come.

Please take some time to read through this information. It is a response to questions which have been asked and more. *And, as you begin, please take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit for His help for all of us. The Spirit is the dynamic breath of God who carries the Church through every age!*

Perhaps the most important first question is: *Why does this have to happen?*

The critical need for these changes is important to understand. Change is difficult for parishioners and is no less difficult for the clergy and parish leadership. It would be much easier simply to try to maintain the status quo for as long as possible and not have to experience the pain, resistance, and sometimes anger that often are part of restructuring parishes and schedules. *We need to face the fact that times have changed for the Church.* Our Masses are often celebrated in partially-filled churches, and we are currently celebrating 10 Masses each weekend, as well as 2 daily Masses each weekday (including Saturdays), all while maintaining 3 church buildings. In addition, our clergy also have further responsibilities, including the pastoral care of Holy Trinity School, as well as "on call" pastoral care at numerous health care facilities, both in Wallingford and beyond town lines. Embracing this new pastoral reality for the Church, rather than attempting to maintain what worked in the past or that with which we are comfortable, is crucial to our health as Church. A church that is outward-focused and reading the signs of the times is a church that grows; the Apostles and early Christians knew that and acted on it! In our times, we must do the same.

If we currently have four priests, why do we have to change the Mass schedule now?

In addition to Father Mendoza and Father Lane, who are both active priests, (meaning they are engaged in full time ministry), right now, Wallingford Catholics are blessed by the ministry of two additional priests. Father Hugh MacDonald is retired; his ministry to us is a gift. However, as a senior priest, he is not engaged in full time ministry and has the option of concluding his service at any time. Father Joseph Devine is scheduled to retire sometime in 2026. *Planning for the reality of two active priests serving all Wallingford Catholics is therefore a necessity.* Additionally, changing a Mass schedule when facing a sudden reduction of priests is not good for anyone. In order to be proactive instead of reactive in this regard then, the Transition team has been working with our priests to discern Mass schedule options that will carry us into the future.

What is the law of the Church regarding priests' Mass schedules?

In the November 2024 FAQ Update, there was a reference to the number of Masses at which a

priest is allowed to preside at each day. Moving toward a new Mass schedule, it is important for our entire community to understand what the Universal Law of the Church sets forth and why.

One of the canons (laws) states: "A priest is not to neglect to prepare himself properly through prayer for the celebration of the eucharistic sacrifice and to offer thanks to God at its completion."¹ That preparation through a workable schedule benefits not only the priest in his ministry but all who pray with him at Mass.

Monday-Friday: A priest is permitted to celebrate 1 Mass per day. He may preside at 2 if necessary. Given the shortage of priests, priests of the Archdiocese of Hartford may preside at 2 Masses per day. That may include weekday Masses, funerals, and/or weddings.

Saturday: The same weekday regulations apply to Saturdays but in this case there are also Sunday Vigil Masses (which count towards a priest's Saturday Mass allowance).

Sunday: A maximum of 3 Masses on Sundays and holy days are allowed in times of shortages of priests.

Currently, there are 10 Sunday Masses being offered between The Church of the Resurrection and Most Holy Trinity Parish at three church buildings. *Very soon, Wallingford will be served by only two priests.* Two priests will not only have to preside at their assigned Masses, but also would like very much to have the time to interact with parishioners after Mass before then needing to travel to another campus for their next responsibility. We must reduce the number of Masses in Wallingford while making sure that the Eucharist is available to all.

We have a number of incoming seminarians. Why not just wait out the shortage of priests because things are getting better?

The entry of 11 men of varying ages and backgrounds into the seminary for the Archdiocese of Hartford this year is an answer to prayer. At the same time, we are also blessed by 22 men currently in formation for the Permanent Diaconate for the Archdiocese, as well as 31 women now in discernment for religious life and for service to their communities. Tens of thousands of Catholics throughout the Archdiocese have been praying for new vocations, supporting the incredible work of our Office of Seminarians and Vocations.

So, what might the road ahead look like then? If a man enters the seminary from high school, his formation will take approximately 9 years. If a man enters the seminary with a Bachelor's degree, his formation will take approximately 7 years. Most importantly, seminary formation is a *discernment process*. Throughout the years, the seminary faculty and the man himself are praying and testing the call: "Is he truly being called to the priesthood?" Not every man who enters the seminary is ordained to the priesthood. None of this is to understate the gift of eleven seminarians. Those sort of numbers also need to be sustained into the future. With God's help, they will be; however we will not see the fruit of this increase for some time.

Can we seek the help of priests from religious orders? Are there possibilities of more international priests? What about retired priests?

Religious communities often are facing the same shortages as the diocesan priesthood. These communities regularly reassess the viability of their current ministries given their available number of

¹ Code of Canon Law, 1983, Canon 909

active members. *If a priest from another country wants to come to the U.S.*, that request needs to be accepted by both his bishop and ours. If it is his second language, he will need to be proficient in English and be able to be understood by English-speakers. With Archdiocesan assistance, he will have to work through immigration processes. He also needs to become comfortable with the culture and Church in the United States. In short, coming to the U.S. to minister is a significant process. *Retired priests* increasingly are becoming fewer in number and are not obligated to take on weekend responsibilities. In many cases, these men were in active ministry for more than fifty years. We as Church need to continue to search for viable and sustainable solutions which will lead to an increase in local active priests.

Would having a Sunday Communion service led by a deacon or layperson rather than Mass be a possible solution?

The Second Vatican Council referred to the Eucharist as “the source and summit of the Christian life.”² And, yes, being an active participant at Mass each Sunday is still an obligation for Catholic Christians. For those who attend Mass regularly, this “obligation” is far more than a duty. Sunday Eucharist is life-giving and is rooted in our love for Christ.

The following words of the U.S. Catholic Bishops shed important light regarding communion services conducted in the absence of a priest: “Indeed, in some places, one priest is assigned as pastor of several parishes and is barely able to provide Sunday Mass in each of these communities. In some places, Sunday Mass is not possible each week. Thus, the ritual book *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* was developed.”³ Sadly, there are places where there are *no* priests available and in response to those situations, permission has been given to have a service of Word and Communion on a Sunday led by a deacon or layperson. That dire situation is not the case in the Archdiocese of Hartford. In the new Wallingford parish, multiple Sunday Mass times will be available. The time or location of Sunday Mass might have to change for Wallingford Catholics, but the availability of Sunday Mass will not.

In the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Christ’s dying and rising is made present for us here and now! It is with gratitude that our parish can continue to gather for the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, praying with our priest at the consecration and witnessing again the call of Christ to “Do this in memory of me,” without undue hardship.

What additional updates are there about a new Mass schedule?

Still in the process of listening and refining a schedule, the plan is to begin with an *interim* (short-term) weekend schedule of 7 Sunday (Saturday vigils + Sunday) Masses that will be implemented later this year, based on the assistance of more than two priests. It is envisioned that the announcement of an interim schedule would be made with ample time for all to become acquainted with and to prepare for these changes.

²Pope Paul VI. “Sacrosanctum Concilium.” www.vatican.va, 4 Dec. 1963, www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html. / Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324, 2180.

³“Weekday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest.” USCCB, 2025, www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/the-mass/frequently-asked-questions/weekday-celebrations-in-the-absence-of-a-priest. 18 Feb. 2025

The *final* weekend schedule will consist of 6 Sunday Masses (Saturday vigils + Sunday) which can be celebrated by two priests and it will be implemented once our parish is being served by only two priests. Right now, the exact date of the implementation of the final (long-term) weekend schedule is unknown. However, once the decision is made to move to a final Mass schedule, it will be communicated in a timely and transparent manner. The majority of weekend Masses, both in the interim and final schedules, will be celebrated in English, with one celebrated in Spanish, as is currently the case. The weekday Mass schedule also will need to undergo change. In this regard, the Transition Team is considering all relevant factors and input as they work with Fr. Mendoza to discern our new schedule of worship.

Is there any further information regarding the possible closure of any of our churches?

The closure of a church campus is an event of particular poignancy and emotion in the life of any parish community. It is a decision that is never approached or made lightly but also that can never be completely ruled out given the ever-changing needs and resources of an ever-changing parish community. At present, the leadership of our parish communities are engaged in a prayerful reevaluation of the present resources of our two parishes, both physical and fiscal. In addition, our parishes, in coordination with the Archdiocese of Hartford, have engaged the services of a professional engineering firm to evaluate the present conditions, and to estimate the future upkeep costs, of all of the buildings (churches, rectories, school, etc.) presently owned by our parishes. These evaluations will help us to determine, and to prioritize, the resources that we will have available to meet the needs of our new united parish (physical, fiscal, and spiritual), both in the present and for years to come. This is an ongoing process and no decisions have yet been made. Should any decisions need to be made, that information will be communicated in an ongoing manner and opportunities for parishioner input will be made available.

What about the blending of parish ministries and faith formation?

Bringing together the ministries of both parishes as well as youth faith formation are in the early planning stages. A great deal of time is being devoted to the merger process itself as that must be the first step. As soon as possible, information on ministries and faith formation will be shared, especially in coordination with those who participate in them directly.

Your prayerful reflection on the information in this update is very much appreciated. Transition Team members will be available to answer questions and receive feedback at listening sessions at 6 PM on Thursday, March 13 at Church of the Resurrection and also at 6 PM on Friday, March 14 at Most Holy Trinity Church Hall. You may also email any questions or feedback that you may have to the Transition Team at [*wfdtransitionteam@gmail.com*](mailto:wfdtransitionteam@gmail.com)

Our continued prayers to the Holy Spirit will provide us with a greater share of those gifts that we need to navigate these changes: deepened wisdom, a broad vision that seeks to respond to our present reality as well as the needs of the entire community, and hope in God. The process of bringing our parishes together - not simply in name but in lived reality - is a significant journey. Jesus' words to his disciples are the root of our faith and hope: "And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!" (Mt 28: 20b)