

Why Change the Mass Schedule?

On the weekend of November 22–23, our parish communities of Queen of All Saints, St. Mary, and Notre Dame will vote on a new Mass schedule that will take effect the first Sunday of Lent 2026. This is an important step as we continue moving forward in the unification of the Michigan City parishes.

Our original plan was to hold the vote in January, but because many parishioners travel during the winter months, it is more practical and more inclusive to hold the vote earlier.

I know that any change in Mass times or parish structure can feel unsettling. Many of us are deeply attached to particular churches, times, and traditions. Those attachments are real and deserve respect. At the same time, similar changes are happening across the country as the Church responds to shifting demographics and pastoral realities. My hope is that, by understanding the reasons behind these changes, we can approach this transition with faith, hope, and openness of heart.

It is important to see the full context of our situation here in Michigan City. We priests minister to three parish sites and two schools, and we serve two distinct language communities. In effect, we are serving four distinct communities: Queen of All Saints, St. Mary, Notre Dame, and the growing Hispanic community of Michigan City - not to mention our two parish schools. With that in view, please allow me to explain some of the reasons for the change in Mass schedules and for moving toward combining our individual communities.

1. Fewer priests are available to serve

Currently three full-time priests serve our three communities, but this situation will not last indefinitely. The bishop has asked me to prepare for a time when I may be the only priest serving Michigan City. While he hopes an associate may be assigned, that may not be feasible in the near future.

For perspective: when I was ordained in 1997, there were 120 active diocesan priests under age 70 in our diocese. By 2030 - just five years from now - it is estimated that only about 30 will remain. According to diocesan planning, there may be just four diocesan priests serving all of Starke and LaPorte Counties. The Diocese is currently engaged in a Pastoral Planning Program; at this point the plan includes a proposal to close between 10 and 20 currently operating worship sites throughout the Diocese.

This decline means we must prepare now. Reducing the number of Masses and consolidating parishes in Michigan City allows us to be proactive rather than reactive. Even the new Mass times that begin on the first Sunday of Lent 2026 may not be the final, definitive schedule. If I eventually become the only priest in Michigan City, we would almost certainly have only four weekend Masses: one Saturday evening and three on Sunday (two in English and one in Spanish). This is a possible future eventuality of which we must be aware.

2. Priest well-being

As the number of priests declines, the responsibilities for each priest increase. We must ensure that priests remain healthy, prayerful, and balanced in their ministry. What was once carried out by many priests is now often the work of only one or two. While I love my vocation deeply, multiplying Masses beyond what is pastorally necessary is not a wise use of a priest's time or energy.

Aligning the number of Masses with actual pastoral need supports the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of our priests. Healthy priests can serve with compassion, attentiveness, and joy - and that benefits the entire parish community.

I know that some may feel hurt, frustrated, or even angry about the changes in our Mass times or locations. These feelings are understandable - change is rarely easy, especially when it touches something as sacred and personal as our parish life.

At the same time, I gently ask that we direct our energy not toward blame or frustration, but toward prayer and understanding. The current pastoral team has inherited a situation that has been unfolding for many years, and we are doing our best to serve the needs of all our communities with faithfulness and care.

I have also seen, at times, that some people respond to change by withholding their financial support or reducing their participation at Mass. While this reaction often comes from pain or disappointment, it ultimately weakens the very community we love and are trying to strengthen.

Let us instead pray that God will grant us unity, patience, and wisdom during this time of transition. Rather than giving in to discouragement, gossip, or blame, may we work together with hope and trust - building a future for the Church in Michigan City that is stronger, more faithful, and more united than ever before.

3. Strengthening our liturgical life

When attendance is spread too thin across many Masses, churches can feel empty and worship can seem less vibrant. A building that seats 800 with only 150 people present lacks a sense of community and shared prayer.

Reducing the number of Masses will form larger, more engaged congregations, which allows for better music, fuller participation, and more liturgical ministers - lectors, ushers, servers, and choir members. A fuller church naturally fosters greater joy, unity, and reverence in the Eucharist. Fewer Masses also allow the priest to give full attention and energy to each liturgy, making each celebration more prayerful and uplifting for all.

In next week's bulletin you will have the opportunity to review several proposed Mass schedules. Please reflect carefully and be ready to indicate your preferences on the weekend of November 22–23. You will be asked to rank the options from one (most preferred) to five (least preferred).

Change is never easy, but it can also be an opportunity for renewal and growth. Let us approach this process with trust in the Holy Spirit, who always guides the Church forward. Together, with charity and prayer, we can continue building a vibrant, faith-filled community in Michigan City — ready to meet both the challenges and blessings of the future.