

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT FROM OUR PASTOR, FATHER MICHAEL HOBSON

Many years ago when first ordained, I was very involved with the parish youth group in which we would pray the Rosary, go to Mass in Boston at the Arch Street Shrine, and even lead the parish in praying the Stations of the Cross during Lent. Other activities included ski trips and whitewater rafting trips. If you are familiar with whitewater rafting, you would know that people in the inflatable raft are situated on each side with paddles to navigate the whitewater rapids. If the raft must turn toward the LEFT to avoid rapids, then the RIGHT side paddles more strongly than the left side. If the raft must turn toward the RIGHT to avoid rapids, then the LEFT paddles more strongly than the right side. However, if one side OR the other does not paddle at all, the raft will simply keep spinning around in one direction or the other.

As a Collaborative of Our Lady of the Lake (serving Halifax, Hanson, Pembroke, and Plympton) and Saint Joseph the Worker (serving Hanson and Pembroke), we are very much in one boat/raft together. It is very important that we “paddle” together as we navigate the challenging rapids of our present age, if we are to truly evangelize in the name of our Lord Jesus.

The following core statement was read at all Masses for the weekend of November 23rd/24th at Our Lady of the Lake and Saint Joseph the Worker:

I would like to begin by thanking so many of you who have worked so hard for the success of our collaborative.

We have had many successes over the past year, such as an active Knights of Columbus men’s group, Sodality of Our Lady women’s group (who are hosting the annual craft fair this weekend), active outgroup support groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, and the Family Healing and Recovery Ministry for those dealing with Substance Abuse Disorder (opiate addiction).

At the same time, we have had many challenges. This announcement may come as a surprise to many of you. Beginning this coming January, at Saint Joseph the Worker, we will combine the 9am and noon Masses to a single Mass at 10:30am on Sundays.

The most recent census data tracking Mass attendance around the South Shore in the past 10 years indicates very clearly: we are not declining; we are in *free fall*. As a result of a growing *secularism*, we have witnessed a tremendous loss of faith in our own region and throughout the diocese. Sadly, the worship of God is no longer a priority for many of our Catholic families.

We are no exception here at Saint Joseph the Worker (as you may have read in the recent Grand Annual letter). Our losses have become particularly pronounced at the 9am and noon Masses. As a result, (seeing a 2/3-empty church, Sunday after Sunday), it is easy to see why some have become discouraged.

By bringing the two Masses together, we aim to achieve the following:

- (1) to allow for a more *intense living out* of our Christian communal life---gathered around the one altar (this will, in fact, bring two-thirds of Saint Joseph the Worker together at one Mass);
- (2) to improve our celebration of the liturgy (the source and summit of our Christian life) ---with sufficient numbers of extraordinary ministers, altar servers, and ushers;
- (3) to begin a new missionary effort to the “fallen away” and, at the same time, to become more intentional in our *own* discipleship.

This last point cannot be sufficiently emphasized. Each of us, upon leaving Mass, must ask: “How can I love you more, my Lord? What can I do to bring one more person back to friendship with you?”

We have become missionaries in mission territory.

Hanson is mission territory.

Pembroke is mission territory.

Halifax is mission territory.

Nor will these changes be limited to Saint Joseph the Worker. As a second “phase” of our plan, when our collaborative is reduced to a single priest (we don’t know when that will be, but the number of active priests is diminishing by 13 every year---between deaths and ordinations) ---, we anticipate that the 4pm and 10:30am Masses at Our Lady of the Lake will be *moved* to Saint Joseph the Worker. At the same time, a 5:00pm Sunday Mass will be added at Our Lady of the Lake. This will allow a single priest to cover all the weekend Masses, and to strengthen the collaborative as a whole.

To give you some perspective, as many of you already know, Saint Thecla’s, Saint Helen’s and Saint Mary’s will eventually close as they prepare to build a single large church.

These are hard times for all of us. We are grateful that so many of you continue to practice your faith with loyalty to our Lord. When I recall the history of our Church and the many devoted Catholics who gave their lives to attend Mass, my hope is that many of us can, too, respond *generously* to the present challenges.

Let us ask the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, and her spouse, Joseph the Worker, to help us make a smooth transition during these coming weeks, and to bring many, many back to our Lord. May we always place our Faith, Hope and Trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.