

June 7, 2020

Dear Fellow Parishioners,

Change is never easy as many of us have been experiencing through this COVID-19 crisis. So many things that we were used to doing, now has to be done differently or possibly we cannot do them at all. As a diocese, we have reached a time of significant change. Our diocese is adopting a Family of Parishes model of ministry. This uniting of two or more parishes, each maintaining their identity, working together and sharing resources allows us to focus on being mission-oriented.

Our parishes of St. John the Baptist and St. Anthony of Padua have been selected by Bishop Fabbro to be readied for activation. Prior to the pandemic the original scheduled date for activation was this coming July 6th. This effort has required the attention and work of a Transition Team who have been working on your behalf since March (see names and contact information below). Some of the decisions we were asked to consider included: coming up with a name for the Family, looking at staffing issues, assessing and determining the best use of the buildings and gathering spaces, determining a new weekday and weekend Mass schedule, and coming up with a pastoral plan for the next six months. Although there has been a delay in the activation of our Family, as we all look ahead, take comfort in knowing that the faith communities of St Anthony of Padua and St John the Baptist will be a Family when we receive our official activation in the months ahead.

Some of these decisions were easy and appropriately discerned by the Team, with help from the diocese. Other decisions, we feel also require input from the parishioners. Our intent was to have various "Town Hall" meetings so that people could come together to share ideas and discuss different options. The COVID-19 virus restrictions however changed this for us. Fr. Rick is retiring at the end of June and we do not have another priest that can be sent to replace him. Fr. Matt will be the only priest assigned to serve our Family of Parishes of Harrow and Amherstburg.

The Transition Team had to make some very difficult decisions, which we did. We have a new temporary Mass schedule. Once the COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and we can get your feedback on the changes, we will do so. As we know, we do not live in a perfect world so will that mean some sacrifices may be involved? Yes, probably so. But if we are all ready to "give a little now", in the end we will find we will all "receive a lot in return". Working together, being open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, being a Family of prayer, valuing the gift(s) of each person - these are the foundation stones that will make our Family of Parishes strong and will help it to thrive.

Family of Parishes Name

The Transition Team following Diocesan criteria, proposed: "Amherstburg-Harrow Catholic Family of Parishes", and Bishop Fabbro has approved our new name. In all Family correspondence, i.e. mailouts, bulletin, webpage, social media, etc., we will be referred to as the "Amherstburg-Harrow Catholic Family of Parishes". Please note, the individual parish names do not change. Your parish affiliation is still with whatever parish you are registered in. Now, the two parishes will be working together to better serve the needs of both communities and enable a new spirit of outreach.

Weekday Mass Schedule

Canon Law (Church Law), only permits a priest to celebrate one community Mass per day. We decided to split the four weekday Masses between the two parishes as follows:

Location	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Amherstburg	No Mass	9:00am	No Mass	9:00am
Harrow	6:30pm	No Mass	9:00am	No Mass

To allow Fr. Matt the opportunity to attend meetings on Tuesdays, the Mass time was moved to 6:30pm. Confessions will be from 5:45 to 6:15pm. Fr. Matt intends to maintain the monthly celebration of Mass/liturgy at Stella Maris and St. Anthony schools and at the parish Extended Care Facilities.

Weekend Mass Schedule

This was a very challenging decision to make and will be one of the key areas we will want further input from you as soon as we can. The current Mass schedule is not possible for one priest to manage. Each parish would have to sacrifice one Mass and on Sunday we believe there needs to be a two hour separation between Masses to help Fr. Matt have time to meet and greet people and for travel. We decided to keep the 5:00pm Saturday evening Mass at St. John the Baptist (confessions 4:00-4:45pm). Also, each parish would have a Mass Sunday morning and since St. Anthony's gave up the Saturday evening Mass they would keep their Sunday morning Mass. Thus, employing the "two hour" separation, that meant the Sunday morning Mass at St. John the Baptist would be moved to 11:00am.

Schedules	Harrow	Amherstburg
Saturday Masses	No Mass	5:00pm Mass
Sunday Masses	Harrow 9:00am	Amherstburg 11:00am

Offices

Most parish requests can be done via the computer, over the phone, or our parishioners can come to the Amherstburg office. Fr. Matt will have office hours (by appointment) in Harrow every Thursday for people who wish to see him there. All other appointments during the rest of the week will be in Amherstburg. As well, every Sunday in Harrow, somebody from the parish office will be present before/after Mass to answer any “parish office questions”, schedule Mass intentions, arrange for sacramental certificates to make it easier to deal with such issues. Otherwise, these matters can be handled in the Amherstburg office during office hours Tuesday—Friday, 9:00am to 4:30pm.

Donations

All donations that you offer to the church will go to the church where you are registered, regardless of which church location you attend. So, if you are registered at St. Anthony’s and attend the Saturday evening Mass in Amherstburg, your envelope would be deposited at St. Anthony’s and vice versa. Your envelope donations go to where you are registered, not to where you attend. Any donations not in an envelope, i.e. loose money, will go to wherever the money is collected from.

Other issues

Anyone involved in a ministry, especially a liturgical ministry (lector, Eucharistic Minister, etc.), will be encouraged to offer that ministry in whatever church they attend. Our programs and sacramental preparation processes will be done “in common”, following the same program for our new Family of Parishes. The details are still being finalized. In addition questions about staffing are not fully resolved. Diane O’Neill, Janet Barraco and Jennifer Binder will continue their work and ministry in the Erie Shores South Catholic Family of Parishes. We thank them for their support and wish them continued success. The parish service groups (K of C, CWL, St. Vincent de Paul) will all retain their current Charters and will continue to function and serve the community in which they are currently doing so. They will be encouraged to work together, when appropriate, but no group will have to “merge” with their counterpart as a result of the Family.

Keep Up-to-Date

Please check out our new Family website www.ahcfop.ca or our new Family Facebook page Amherstburg-Harrow Catholic Family of Parishes to find out the latest information about the COVID-19 crisis and news about our new Family of Parishes

Transition Team Information

Our Transition Team is:

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The transition process has been going on throughout COVID-19, and we feel that we making progress. If you have any questions or feel you would like to contribute to the discussion, please email one of the Team members or call the St. John the Baptist parish office (519-736-5418) and you will be connected to the Team member you wish.

Our message to everyone is; Whatever we have now, let’s build on that and help it grow. Let us not be content with “okay”, instead let us aim for “WOW”. The road may be a little bumpy along the way, but what an exciting road to be on!

As Bishop Fabbro stated in Spring 2019 Diocesan Newsletter: *The Family of Parishes model will enable our priests, despite their declining numbers, to continue to minister to the needs of our people. Parishes can work together to be more effective in their mission, for example, collaborating to sponsor a refugee family or to hire a youth minister or a business administrator. With hope, prayer, patience, and hard work, and the guidance of the Spirit, we will be a vibrant, mission-oriented Church.*

Become part of the process, provide us your feedback, volunteer your time and talent. Help make this a positive path forward.

In Christ,
The Transition Team