

A Letter from the Pastor

Mass Schedule Changes Beginning in July

Live-Streamed Masses to End in July

May 8, 2021

Dear Friends,

As you already know, in order to accommodate as many people as possible given the State of Maine mandate to limit indoor worship gatherings to 50, we temporarily added four additional weekend Masses in our Cluster parishes over a year ago. Thus, we went from a total of 7 Masses (8 in the Summer) to a total of 12 Masses (13 in the Summer). That occupancy limit was raised to 50 percent of total building capacity last month, and will be increased to 75 percent total building capacity by the end of May. Our three churches are large enough to accommodate these increased numbers while still maintaining proper social distancing. As capacity limitations due to Covid19 continue to ease, and as more and more of us are being vaccinated, we anticipate that we will return to our pre-Covid 19 Mass schedule beginning July 1st. The additional Masses allowed us to meet our primary goal of making the Eucharist available to as many people as possible. The four extra Masses also came with a price: complete lack of music at several of the Masses and extra duty for our music ministers at those Masses with music, strain on clergy and lay liturgical ministers, strain on volunteer coordinators, enlistment of retired priests in order to cover all the Masses, and the inability of the pastor and parochial vicar for a regular, rotating presence at all three worship sites—just to name a few of the challenges.

Returning to our former schedule will enhance and improve the quality and reverence of our Sunday worship experience, as well as help to restore a sense of community and normalcy among our parishioners. It will also allow us to resume our seasonal Sunday evening Mass at the Sebago Chapel. We will continue to closely monitor official guidance developments and strictly adhere to whatever the CDC, State of Maine and Diocesan directives are in place at the time regarding social distancing, the wearing of masks, surface disinfection, sign-in procedures, etc. And, of course, if there are unexpected negative developments in the days ahead regarding the Covid pandemic and vaccine effectiveness, we may need to postpone implementing these changes.

Effective July 1st the following Masses will be eliminated:

- Ø 5:30 Saturday Vigil at St. Anne
- Ø 9:30 am Sunday Mass at St. Anne
- Ø 8:30 am & 10:00 am Sunday Masses at St. Anthony (*to be combined into a single 9:30 Mass*)
- Ø 11:30 am Mass at Our Lady's

The revised Mass schedule effective July 1 is:

- √ **St. Anthony:** **Saturday Vigil at 4 pm & Sunday 9:30 am**
- √ **St. Anne:** **Sunday 8:00 am and 11:00 am**
- √ **Our Lady's:** **Saturday Vigil at 4 pm & Sunday at 8:00 am and 10:15 am**
- √ **Sebago Chapel:** **Sunday 5 pm (*July 4 through Labor Day weekend*)**

Let me take this opportunity to thank Fr. Reggie and the Jesuit Fathers for their generous service in covering these extra Masses this past year that made all this possible. I also want to express my appreciation to our music ministers who have taken on extra responsibilities and extra Masses, as well as our parishioner volunteer coordinators at all three worship sites for their dedication and faithfulness in the exercise of this brand-new ministry of service. Let's not forget the amazing response of the Knights of Columbus in setting up and directing the very popular drive-in Masses at St. Anne with Fr. Cartwright offering "Mass on the Deck"—the last one being held on Christmas Eve.

And thank all of you parishioners for your flexibility and patience during these challenging times. Many of you were ready and willing to change your accustomed Mass time and attend one of the additional Masses in order to “level the curve.” It worked! I am proud to say that throughout this pandemic, our Cluster parishes were able to avoid reservation systems and turning people away through the addition of Masses and the cooperation of our parishioners and the ingenuity of our dedicated volunteers.

On a related note, *we will discontinue the live-streaming of Masses, both weekend and weekdays, from Our Lady’s beginning July 1.* When we began the live-stream almost 14 months ago, our churches were closed and the live-stream provided a way for us to connect as parishioners and to connect to our faith. As our churches were gradually reopened to accommodate limited numbers, the live-stream continued to provide a valuable service to our most vulnerable population who, for good reason, were reluctant to return to indoor Masses until they were vaccinated. Our parish was not equipped to provide live-streamed Masses prior to Covid. That’s when Dan and Ellen Kasprzyk and the “Maine Needs Fatima” organization stepped in to provide the technical, state-of-the-art equipment and expertise to produce a professional-grade, 7-days-a-week live-stream of the Mass at no cost to the parish. Then, they recruited and trained a group of faithful volunteers to direct and produce the Masses—some of them driving 14 miles one-way through the snow early in the morning in order to be here. We are all grateful for their generosity and dedication to their ministry.

We have been able to monitor our “viewership” of these live-streamed Masses. The numbers have been more than encouraging—phenomenal, really. Now, I am happy to say that our viewership has been declining in recent weeks—happy because that means more and more parishioners are returning to Mass live and in-person. I do realize that we still have home-bound parishioners who cannot be physically present at our Masses who have very much appreciated the live-stream. However, there will continue to be many opportunities for viewing daily and Sunday Masses on Catholic television and internet live-streams from parishes equipped with live-stream capabilities on a regular basis.

The live-streaming of Masses, as wonderful and successful as it has been, has also come with a price. It is a very expensive endeavor—and for this, we are most grateful to the “America Needs Fatima” organization for absorbing the production costs. The equipment takes up valuable room, and is somewhat distracting for those attending Mass in person. The church resembles a television studio to some extent, and while that served us well these past 14 months, it’s time to restore the dignity and wholeness of our worship space. And on a practical level, we need to reclaim the production area for seating in order to maintain social distancing requirements.

I hope you share my optimism about the future of our soon-to-be newly established canonical parish which will also be effective July 1st. The future will be a “new normal,” no doubt, but I am confident that we can also make it a “better normal” and a most “blessed normal” as well. See you in church!

Wishing you all God’s blessings,

Fr. Low