

Father's Notes

January 19, 2025

Last week, I provided Mass counts, July through November 2024. As a reminder, for St. Thomas' three Masses (seating capacity, 335), the average Mass attendance was as follows, in parentheses: Sat 5:00pm *English* (88); Sun 8:30am *Spanish* (431); and Sun 10:30am *English* (246).

And for St. Philomena's five Masses (seating capacity, 455), the average Mass attendance was as follows, in parentheses: Sat 5:30pm *English* (131); Sun 8:30am *English* (200); Sun 10:30am *English* (258); Sun 1:00pm *Spanish* (558); and Sun 5:00pm *Spanish* (397). Based on our current schedule (the number of Masses and their respective times), but also based on attendance, we might ask: *Is this the right (best?) schedule for Sunday Masses?* To be clear, I have no current plan to change the Mass schedule, but at some point, we must evaluate.

I remember a priest, more experienced than me, explaining the following principle to guide construction of a Sunday Mass schedule: *Each parish should begin with just one Mass. If there are too many people for that one Mass, a second Mass should be offered. If there are too many people for those two Masses, a third should be offered, and so on. Please read this paragraph again.*

Yet, in our parishes—in many cases, based upon a time when there was a greater number of priests—we created a schedule designed to provide options. Like most any of you, I like options. But again, we must evaluate at some point, to ensure our Mass schedule best accommodates our larger task of Mission, as individual disciples and as a parish. So, let us ask: *What if we were to start over with a Mass schedule? How would it differ from what is current?*

First, a Mass schedule should consider reasonable times of day for the faithful to attend (not at 10:00pm). Second, the Mass schedule should provide for the number of people attending, with the goal of allowing for people to not be squeezed-in and packed, week to week. Third, consider all other people needed to celebrate every Sunday Masses (musicians, liturgical ministers, etc.).

Finally, ensure that the Mass schedule is sustainable for the number of priests. The greater number of Masses each priest celebrates, the less time and energy he will have for other aspects of parish life (teaching, pastoral care, community events, personal spiritual nourishment). Also consider, if a priest is away, can a visiting priest cover? For example: *Will a retired priest celebrate four Masses?* In most cases, no.

To be clear, I still have good energy and love serving as your priest. I want to do it in a way that best serves the people of God, and all that comes with it, including the most sacred endeavor of celebrating the Holy Mass.



Father Todd O. Strange (*Pastor*)

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+ St. Thomas Parish (*Tukwila, WA*)