

THOUGHTS FROM YOUR PASTOR: Important Adjustment

It has been one year since I have come to Hardin County to serve the pastoral needs of our parishes and the Ohio Northern community. I have tried my best to be very involved in all three of my assignments, and I want to thank everyone for your help and support as well as your patience as I juggle a host of commitments and responsibilities. One of the things I have tried to do over the past year, as any pastor should, is to listen to the pastoral needs of the people, see “where we stand” in the state of our parishes, and discern how best to meet those needs. That process is ongoing as I continue to meet with groups, committees, staff, and talk informally with a host of individuals. For example, at Kenton, one of the most serious needs I became aware of immediately was the critical state of the roof of the St. Anthony Center, the top floor of which had been closed by the local fire department, so bad was the leakage of the roof. Accordingly, I have spent much of my time over the past year to address this need for the benefit of the Kenton parish: the first phase (replacing the flat roof) is done, and the next phase (replacing two slanted sides of the roof) is about to begin soon. We are also in the midst of addressing the serious tuckpointing and plaster issues of the church.

At our Ada parish (OLL), as I have listened to many people, one of the most serious needs that I have heard is to find a solution to the situation of the times of weekend Masses which have proven very problematic for a great many people. The Saturday night Mass, at 6:30 p.m., is extremely late, and the Sunday morning Mass at 11:00 has proven an issue since the time of the clustering when it became the *only* Sunday option available for Ada. Ada historically had an 11:00 Mass for many years, but it also had an earlier option to “balance” what would otherwise be a fairly late morning Mass (especially for family commitments later in the day, etc). Many parishes have an 11:00 Mass, but not as the *only* option for Sunday. Kenton’s 9:00 Mass is more of an “ideal” time that works well for most. But I have heard many concerns with Ada’s 11:00 Mass being too late as its *only* option. As a result, I have been apprised of the fact that a good many folks from Ada have gone to other parishes in the Lima area for earlier Masses, many of whom would likely return to OLL if an additional earlier option were available.

So...to address these specific pastoral concerns in the Ada (and ONU) communities and serve the needs of the people, I have proposed a solution for OLL which I have discussed with many of the staff and principal volunteers at OLL. The question of Mass times is challenging one, because of so many logistical factors at play that we have to consider, especially in a “cluster” of parishes. I have been through a “clustering” in my past, and I can appreciate some of the challenges involved. A primary factor, which I hear was considered at the time of our own clustering, is that the cluster Masses normally need to be scheduled so that one priest, when needed, could cover all the Masses. But it occurred to me that locally, this is a need primarily in the *summer* months, when I or Fr. Jeffrey are sometimes on vacation. But during the *school year*, this situation is rare, mainly in the case of illness. Accordingly, it could work to add, at OLL, an 8:30 a.m. Mass on Sundays *during the school-year months (Sept-May)*. Even though this would “overlap” Kenton’s 9:00 Mass, it would be rare that one priest would need to cover all the Masses. And on the rare occasion this need might arise, Ada would still have its 11:00 Mass (as it has always had), and the earlier 8:30 Mass could be handled via outside coverage (if enough preparation times allows for this) or via a “Sunday Celebration in the Absence of a Priest” if an illness is sudden. And even in that case, again, an actual *Mass* at OLL would still be available that day at 11:00. Further, adding an 8:30 a.m. Mass for Ada has the benefits of not disturbing OLL’s current PSR time (9:45-10:45), minimizing “change” (none of us likes “change” all that much!), and would, primarily again, address the pastoral needs of those in Ada who need to have a Mass earlier than 11:00. Consultation with some of the Newman Club leadership also revealed that the students would find it helpful to have 2 Mass options: some like the 11:00 to “sleep in”, and some others would like an earlier Mass to allow more of the day for schoolwork. Ada also, historically, had been used to a “school year” vs. a “summer” schedule.

Also for Ada, there seems to be consensus in my discussions to move the Saturday Mass from 6:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m, and to enact this all year round. On those occasions when one priest needs to cover both Saturday Masses, the Ada Confessions could be offered *after* its 5:30 Mass (and Church teachings do allow for a penitent to receive Communion at Mass with the intention of going to Confession at the next opportunity, which here would be immediately after Mass).

So...that is what I would like to do, in order to address some of the pastoral needs of Ada and ONU. Beginning with Sept 7/8, Ada will offer, on Sundays, an 8:30 a.m. Mass in addition to 11:00 a.m. during the school year, and Ada’s Saturday Mass will be at 5:30 p.m. permanently. Please be aware that these adjustments will require a period of “transition” regarding liturgical volunteering as folks return to OLL and we get a better sense of how to “staff” the Masses. Some Masses may initially need to be “a cappella” or have a minimum of Eucharistic ministers, for instance. But, at the same time, as I will stress more in the future, we will need more people to “step up” and pitch in and help out in these roles. As I try to respond and address the real pastoral needs of Ada, I urge everyone to support these efforts by your participation. And I ask our fellow disciples at Kenton to understand and support the real pastoral issues going on at Ada. We are all ‘in it together’ as we strive to serve Jesus our Lord as witnesses of the light and hope of the Gospel to all of Hardin County!