



Chronology of
Letters to Parishioners and
Friends of St. Dominic Church
In Regards to the
Change in Mass Schedule

2024



Saint Dominic Catholic Church

Dominican Friars

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Established 1852

May 26, 2024

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Dominic Church,

I write to you today to invite your comments on a proposal to modify the Mass schedule of the parish. This proposal reflects a 50% decrease in Mass attendance over the last 20 years, waning volunteer support, and responsible stewardship to direct efforts and resources to the areas of growth within the parish.

I have consulted with the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Finance Council and have their support for presenting this proposal to the parish.

Proposal for Adjustments to the Mass Schedule

Considering the seating capacity of the church (600 comfortably), current attendance at the weekday and weekend Masses, and the opportunities to pray with the Dominican community, the following is proposed:

1. Discontinue the 5:00 p.m. Sunday Mass.
 - a. Duplicates Sunday evening Masses scheduled at 3 neighboring parishes.
 - b. Most attendees are visitors, who will not be impacted by the change.
 - c. The paid director and the paid lead guitarist have given notice of intent to retire and relocate outside of the parish.

2. "Relocate" the celebration of the weekday morning Mass to the priory chapel with the Dominican community.
 - a. During the academic calendar year, Mass begins at approximately 7:25 a.m.
 - b. During non-academic times (holidays, summer), Mass begins at 8 a.m.

Implementation

The weekday Mass schedule would begin on Monday, August 26, 2024, which is the first day of the new academic year. The Sunday Mass schedule would begin the weekend of August 31 – September 1, meaning that there will be no evening Mass on Sunday, September 1st and all future Sundays. The proposed changes to the parish Mass schedule should occur at the same time to maximize the effectiveness of communication and minimize confusion.

Feedback from Parishioners

Parishioners are invited to offer feedback in writing (letter or email) to the pastor or members of the Parish Pastoral Council. Feedback must contain a signature and contact information to be considered. Feedback can express support or non-support for the proposal. Reasons, concerns, and alternative proposals are welcome.

Change is never easy. For the greater good of the parish, its growth and fruitfulness, and the well-being of the pastor and parish staff, some are asked to make a sacrifice. All are asked to be supportive and understanding of one another.

[Feedback is requested no later than Friday, June 21, 2024.](#) The parish pastoral council and I will review the feedback shortly thereafter.

Looking Ahead

The future of our parish is bright and hopeful. New families with children have registered. They will need formation in the faith and preparation for the sacraments. Adults have expressed an interest in becoming Catholic, which invites the parish to have a more robust process of welcoming inquirers and helping them to encounter Jesus in his Church and the Sacraments. The sacred music program is expanding with musicians and repertoire toward a vision of offering the full and rich musical heritage of the Church. A small team of parishioners are engaged in evangelization training and will be going into our neighborhood. Adult faith formation has expanded into home cenacles and continues to welcome new participants. The Dominican Friars are offering to make St. Dominic's a center of preaching on contemporary topics.

Conclusion

The renewal and growth of our parish depends upon God and our cooperation with his grace. The modification of the Mass schedule is a pruning so that we can direct personnel, time, and resources toward actual needs as our parish experiences growth and renewal. Thank you for your prayerful consideration and feedback.

Let us love one another and pray for each other,

Fr. George, O.P.

P.S. For the supporting spiritual foundation, historical information, actual data, and the rationale for updating the Mass schedule, please see the next three pages.

Supporting Details

What follows is the supporting spiritual foundation, historical information, actual data, and the rationale for updating the Mass schedule. Please read this information carefully and prayerfully.

Lectio Divina

At Mass on the Fifth Sunday of Easter, we heard the Gospel from John chapter 15. In verses 1 and 2 Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit." The source of parish life is Jesus. He is the vine from whom we receive the Word of God and the Sacraments of the Church. He is the vine upon whom we are grafted at our Baptism. He is the vine who fills us with the Holy Spirit to cause the growth of virtue and holiness in us. He is the vine who surrenders himself and us to the pruning work of the Father so that we can bear more fruit. Can we as a parish see and accept the changes in the Mass schedule as the Lord's pruning that will bear greater fruit in the future of our parish?

A Dominican Parish

St. Dominic Church was established in 1852 by the Dominican Friars of the Province of St. Joseph. The consecrated religious life of the friars deeply informs the sacramental, preaching, and pastoral ministry provided to the parish. The structure of religious life comprises time for the Liturgy of the Hours prayed in common, time for personal prayer, study, and homily preparation, time for common meals and other community meetings, and time for personal and communal recreation. The religious life of the friars assigned to serve the parish (pastor, parochial vicar, deacon) is lived in tandem with the duties and responsibilities of parish life. Time is required of the pastor for community commitments in addition to the time required for parish commitments. This relationship brings a unique ethos and character to the parish and its parishioners.

St. Dominic Priory is home to an ever-fluctuating number of Dominican priests, deacons, and brothers. Some are retired, some are full-time professors or students, and some have Mass or preaching commitments not associated with the parish. The deacons and cooperator brothers are not able to celebrate Mass or hear confessions.

The presence of the Dominicans at St. Dominic's has been a stable reality in the ever-changing history of Southwest DC. They remained through the tumultuous years of urban renewal and welcomed the new residents who made Southwest DC their home.

They provided a stable presence in the neighborhood as the development of The Wharf brought many losses, changes, and new residents, businesses, and entertainment venues. Most recently, they remained through the challenges and uncertainties of the Covid-19 pandemic that greatly impacted daily life and the working arrangements of government employees.

The Dominicans now envision an on-going presence at St. Dominic’s that serves the parish and the surrounding metropolitan DC area. Cultural and societal changes ask for a response based upon the truths of the Gospel, the teachings of the Church, and the charity of caring for one’s neighbor. Motivated by the spiritual charism of preaching, the friars desire to make St. Dominic’s a center of preaching to promote all that is good, beautiful, and true for human freedom and flourishing. This vision aligns well with the vision and mission statements of the parish. To support this vision as it expands the evangelization efforts, and spiritual and educational opportunities of the parish, it is necessary to evaluate and adjust the current schedule of Masses.

Data

Here are the statistics of the average Sunday attendance at St. Dominic’s for the last 30 years in 5-year increments. The average weekend Mass attendance has decreased more than 67%.

1993: 979	6 weekend Masses, including Spanish.		2013: 363	4 weekend Masses. Spanish Mass discontinued.
1998: 740	6 weekend Masses, including Spanish.		2018: 365	4 weekend Masses.
2003: 661	6 weekend Masses, including Spanish.		2023: 314	4 weekend Masses.
2008: 497	5 weekend Masses, including Spanish.			

A general breakdown of the current average attendance per weekend Mass is:

5:00 p.m. Saturday: 65	8:00 a.m. Sunday: 50	10:30 a.m. Sunday: 140	5:00 p.m. Sunday 60
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The data for the weekday Masses (Monday – Friday) is anecdotal from experience.

Before the pandemic (March 2020):	Current (April 2024)
8:00 a.m. 15-20	8:00 a.m. 4-8
12:10 p.m. 60-70	12:10 p.m. 15-30

Mass Schedule at Neighboring Parishes:

Parish	Average Count 2023	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday
Holy Comforter-St. Cyprian	443	7:00 a.m.	8:00 a.m. 4:30 p.m. Vigil	8:00; 9:30; 11:00 & 7:00 p.m.
St. Joseph's	472	8:00 a.m. & 12:10 p.m.	8:30 a.m. (1 st only) 5:30 p.m. Vigil	8:30, 10:30 & 12:00
St. Peter's	568	7:30 a.m. & 12:00 p.m.	8:00 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Vigil	9:00, 11:00, & 5:00 p.m.
St. Vincent de Paul	222	12:10 p.m. M, T, Th, F	None. None. Vigil	8:00, 12:00 & 6:30 p.m.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, many volunteers who served at the weekday and weekend Masses have not returned. Some moved away, some retired, and some are no longer available. The smaller pool of volunteers creates scheduling gaps and absences that cause difficulties to celebrate the Mass smoothly. The dearth of volunteers is a reality in parishes throughout the Archdiocese and around the country.

Rationale

A parish of our size and Mass attendance is reasonably served by a pastor, who has complete responsibility for the life, growth, stability, and vitality of the parish. Modifying the Mass schedule will continue to provide parishioners with options for morning or evening Masses to fulfill their Sunday obligation. The modification also allows the pastor to focus his prayer, time, energy, and pastoral care more directly and effectively to the parishioners entrusted to him.



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July 7, 2024

Dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Dominic Church,

I write today to provide the decisions regarding the previously publicized proposals to modify the parish Mass schedule. Beginning Monday, August 26, 2024, the schedule will be modified and remain as follows:

Monday – Friday:

12:10 p.m. in the church.

Saturdays:

9:00 a.m. in the church.

5:00 p.m. in the church. (Anticipated Mass of Sunday.)

Sundays:

8:00 a.m. in the church.

10:30 a.m. in the church.

The Confessions schedule remains unchanged:

Monday – Friday: 11:45 a.m.

Thursday: 7:00 p.m.

Saturday: 4:30 p.m.

Sunday: 9:45 a.m.

Holy Days of Obligation will be celebrated in the church. The schedule will be announced in the bulletin and on the parish website.

A weekday morning opportunity for Mass will be available in the priory chapel according to the schedule of the Dominican Friars. In general, Mass begins at 7:20 a.m. during the academic calendar year, and at 8:00 a.m. during academic breaks, holidays, and in the summer months. The friars will post changes to the schedule in the rear of the chapel.

The modifications in the parish Mass schedule are the result of collaboration with the parish. First, the pastor consulted with the parish pastoral council, which supported the presentation of the proposal to the parish at large. Second, the proposal letter was published in the bulletin and made available on the parish website. Over the course of four weeks, feedback was invited from parishioners regarding the proposed modifications. Forty-five people provided a response. Some supported the changes, and some did not. The feedback was provided to the pastoral council members in its entirety for their review and prayer. The Parish Pastoral Council convened for a meeting on June 30 with the assistance of Pamela Harris from the Archdiocese of Washington Office of Pastoral Ministry and Social Concerns. Pamela provided an objective perspective when reviewing the data and the feedback. She helped the council members and me to listen to the feedback, listen to one another, and listen to the Holy Spirit. With unanimous consensus, the council offered their full support for the modification of the Mass times as proposed to the parish.

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Parishioners and Friends of St. Dominic Church

July 7, 2024

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A concern expressed by many respondents spoke to the effect of the changes on the Contemporary Ensemble that currently serves at the 5:00 p.m. Sunday Mass. It has served at that Mass and other Masses for well over 25 years, under the leadership of our now previous Director of Music, JC Cantrell. The parish council gave considerable time to consideration and discussion of all the feedback given, including options that would allow the ensemble to continue at the parish. Again, considering a variety of factors, a unanimous consensus was reached that the ensemble would not be rescheduled at another Mass time. Discontinuing the 5:00 p.m. Sunday Mass results in the elimination of the paid positions of Director of the Ensemble and Principal Guitarist.

I ask your understanding that a pastor is also an employer. Matters concerning employees are confidential and cannot be disclosed or discussed publicly by me. The details and circumstances surrounding the involvement of the contemporary ensemble in the liturgical life of the parish are complex and intricate. Thus, I am in a position of managing this issue with the respect the people involved deserve.

The Contemporary Ensemble will provide music for Mass on Sundays at 5 p.m. throughout July. On July 24, we will give recognition for their years of dedication and service to the parish.

Please pray for the parish because we all are impacted by these changes. We need the grace of God to love one another, trust in God's Providence, and continue to walk with the Lord Jesus as his disciples.

May God give us his blessing,



George P. Schommer, O.P.
Pastor