

Pastor's Pen: A Season of Change

In Ecclesiastes 3:1, we read, "There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens." Life is full of changes. Some are welcome and necessary and some are unwelcome yet unavoidable. For the latter changes, they are rarely welcome but can serve as wake-up calls.

Over the past few decades, we have been blessed with many missionary priests from Asia and Africa. Their presence has afforded us help and has kept some very painful consolidations and closures from happening. I am personally deeply grateful for their generosity. However, these priests have to go back to their countries from time to time to renew their visas. Ordinarily, because we have had a supply of retired priests in good health, covering these priests' necessary absences was seamless. However, as the pool of healthy retired priests has shrunk, the ordination of diocesan priests to replace them has been lacking over the last few decades, when these missionary priests have to temporarily go home (some times for four or so weeks, or longer depending on a variety of circumstances) we do not have the personnel to cover for their prolonged absences. This spring and summer, 4 of our missionary priests have to return to their country of origin to renew their visas more or less at the same time. We lack the ability as a diocese to send fill-ins.

This will affect us in Macon, Shelbina, Clarence, and Bevier. It will also affect the parishioners of Marceline, Brookfield, Indian Grove, and Hurricane Branch. Their pastor is one of the four priests who must leave for his home country for an unknown amount of time. From April 27 to an unknown date, I will have to provide weekend and weekday coverage for his parishes and ours.

This will necessitate a temporary schedule to cover these masses. About a year and half ago, the parish councils of the parishes involved, and Fr. Pascal and I devised an emergency schedule. Bishop O'Donnell has signed off on this document. Few will like this, but as I am limited in how many masses I can say, trying to keep travel time to a minimum (it will still mean I drive 185 to 250 miles a weekend), and taking into account mass counts and church sizes, we tried to come up with a reasonable emergency schedule.

The upshot is Macon and Shelbina lose their Saturday Evenings Masses, Brookfield loses their Sunday morning Mass, Marceline has their Sunday morning Mass moved to 7 AM, and a Mass is added at Clarence at 7AM as well. These latter two masses will alternate every other week, with one being a Mass and the other being a "Sunday in the Absence of a Priest"

led by one of our deacons. Marceline and Brookfield have Saturday evening Masses at 4:30 and 6:00 PM respectively and Macon and Shelbina have their normal Sunday morning Masses. A full Mass schedule will be released next weekend.

In addition we are in the process of reworking the weekday mass schedule as well so that both schools (Macon and Marceline) have a school mass. As to the rest, that will be in next week's bulletin as the schedule is being set on Friday afternoon in a meeting with the pastors and their core staff.

As you might imagine, this will mean a long and tight schedule for me over the course of those weeks. I do not receive any additional pay for doing this. As I am making fairly large sacrifices, I am asking you to accept the ones you will have to make as well. The bishop has no choices present other than this. I am in the best health I have been in decades. It is unfortunate that the Macon rectory is out of commission for the foreseeable future. I also beg you to remember that stewardship is about the care of the parish and the upkeep of its mission and not payment for services rendered. I will have enough stress without the added worry of finances. I am calm about this, confident that God will provide the strength I need and knowing this will eventually pass...maybe like a kidney stone...but it will pass.

This weekend we are doing the Called By Name Program. Our participation is so very important. We need good priests. This diocese, in its long history, has never provided from its own pews the necessary priest we need. We have too long relied on the kindness of others to man our parishes. It is now coming back to bite us. For three decades, I have actively recruited and supported. I have long told people that this day was coming. I was either ignored or given a buffet of 'not me' 'not my child' 'the church needs to change who it will ordain and other excuses. It has led to here. What we need is a generosity of spirit. What we need is an openness to God's will. What we need is faith and hope. Excuses change nothing. I would rather not look down the road and see a bleak outcome. It doesn't have to be this way. How long and how bad this gets or how quickly this turns around is largely dependent on our choices in the present.

I ask for your prayers and your patience. I ask for your generosity, kindness, and hope for the future. The mission of the Church remains unaltered even if our Mass schedule gets temporarily altered.