

The Church of Saint Thomas the Apostle and the Church of Christ the King

Collaborative Weekend Mass Schedule

Frequently Asked Questions

Context

The Mass is the source and summit of our life as Catholic Christians. It is the primary focus of our parish communities and of our pastor.

- It fulfills our desire and our duty to respond to God's love
- It allows us to encounter Christ in the most profound way possible
- It allows us to gather and pray with our parish family
- It transforms us by God's sacramental grace

Why do we need to change our Mass schedule?

The designation of Saint Thomas the Apostle and Christ the King as a parish cluster, including the new reality of sharing a single pastor, invites us to examine our Mass schedule. The clustering of parishes is now very common in our Archdiocese (over 30% of the parishes), in dioceses throughout our country, and in dioceses around the world. This is due to many factors including declining Mass attendance and reduced numbers of clergy.

We understand that this change may be difficult. We are asking everyone to come with a generous heart and give this a chance.

The good news is that consolidating Mass offerings can lead to a fuller experience of liturgy and community as well as streamlining our use of human and financial resources.

How are decisions being made about Mass times?

Since arriving, Fr. Erich has engaged in extensive consultation with both parish staffs, parishioner liturgical leadership at both parishes, and both pastoral councils regarding our weekend Mass schedule.

The Coordinating Council, created in December, carried this work forward with two parish-wide surveys, each with very high response rates. Feedback specifically from these surveys provided significant insight into the concerns, desires, and opportunities around Mass times. In the most recent survey, some Mass attendees indicated a strong preference for a certain day (i.e. Saturday versus Sunday) and we have tried to respond to that. In other cases, they indicated a strong preference for a specific time block and we have also tried to respond to that.

Practical concerns such as sanctuary seating capacities, parking availability, and accessibility were also taken into consideration. Pastoral goals such as building community and engaging youth and young families was a significant concern. Other data, including actual attendance records from both parishes, was also taken into account.

With all of this in mind, the Coordinating Council spent significant time discussing and evaluating our situation in order to create the best possible plan. Data deeply informed the process along with careful attention to practical and pastoral concerns.

What are the goals of our new collaborative weekend Mass schedule?

Currently, Saint Thomas the Apostle offers 3 masses per weekend and Christ the King offers 2. By reducing the total from 5 weekend Masses down to 4, we can allow Fr. Erich to be at both parishes each weekend. We will still benefit from the support of a visiting priest each weekend.

Considering our Mass offerings together, we will still have a Saturday evening Mass, a Sunday morning Mass at 9:00am, and a Sunday morning Mass at 11:00am. Keeping these familiar Mass times will be helpful for those for whom the particular Mass time is important.

At most parishes, the most popular timeframe for attending Sunday Mass is between 9:00 and 10:30. In addition, these tend to host associated ministries such as Choir and Faith Formation. In our new collaborative schedule, Saint Thomas the Apostle will continue to have a 9:00am Mass. Christ the King's Sunday morning Mass will move slightly to 9:00am. By keeping a 9:00am at both parishes, we retain a significant sense of stability for both our parishes, our ministries, and our programs.

Why move the Saturday evening Mass and the Sunday 11:00am back and forth between parishes?

We learned from the survey that parishioners cherish their own worship space. In light of that, hosting the Saturday and 11:00 Mass at one parish or the other felt inequitable as both parishes conveyed this strongly. This toggle strategy is intended to help us reduce the number of Masses each weekend while preserving parishioners' access to their own worship space on an equal basis.

Additionally, by taking turns hosting the 4:30 Saturday Mass and the 11:00 Sunday Mass, we integrate flexibility for various ministries, events, and programs including our newly combined Confirmation program. Moving locations also encourages parishioners to either try out the other parish worship experience or try another Mass time at their own.

This sounds confusing. How will we know where Mass will be?

There will be a 9:00am Mass on Sunday morning at each parish. This will be consistent.

The Saturday 4:30 and Sun 11:00 will toggle between the parishes every month. If the Saturday evening Mass is at STA, the Sunday morning 11:00am will be at CTK, and visa versa. We will publish the schedule on each parish's website and remind everyone in our email communications each week. In addition, we will post the schedule at the entrances in case of visitors.

Why can't we keep our current schedule at each parish and continue to use visiting priest presiders?

We are fortunate to have an outstanding cadre of priests who celebrate with us on a regular basis. We are truly blessed! We will continue to invite our familiar priests to celebrate with us from time to time.

In the new Mass schedule, Fr. Erich will be able to be present at both parishes with greater frequency. It is important for the pastor to be with parishioners on a regular basis so that he can know them and they can know him. If the pastor is just one priest along with the subs, then he remains not much more than a sub. While using visiting priests is a blessing in the short term, it is not healthy in the long run.

Given the challenges of clustering, it is even more important that the pastor be present to each parish. The pastor needs to know the people, the needs, and the concerns, and to lead the parish communities in any needed changes. In other words, especially in this time of transition, the pastor needs to be able to truly lead.

Will Masses be conducted in the same way at both parishes?

At a certain level, we can agree that Mass is Mass. It is also true that our communities are far more similar than they are different! Both parishes have the same Pastor, same readings, and same prayers. Some have asked about specific traditions typically associated with Holy Week, Advent, and Christmas. Again, many of these are already very similar. Where there are differences, we believe that they will not limit us but will provide an opportunity for a new experience. (Please note: Currently, the plan is to celebrate the Holy Week Triduum in each parish as we did this year.)

I serve in liturgical ministries in my parish. Will I also be able to serve at the other parish?

Yes. Absolutely! It is sometimes difficult to find enough ministers for various roles. (greeters/ushers, lectors, extraordinary ministers of Holy Communion) It will be helpful if ministers would be willing to serve at both parishes. In addition, serving at both parish will help us to get to know each other and build community. Our liturgy leaders are currently working on new logistics to assist this process

Will this new Collaborative Weekend Mass Schedule be permanent?

Well... nothing is permanent. But we hope it will be stable for a long time. We see this new schedule as part of a process of life in which we "Listen", "Live", and "Learn". First, we consulted, especially through our surveys and our conversations. This was listening. Now we are implementing a new schedule. We will need to live this for a while. Of course, as we live this, we will learn. After we have listened, lived, and learned, together, we will inevitably start the process anew.

While we have worked hard to come up with a schedule that meets the most needs and encourages us to thrive, there may be some additional corrections/changes along the way.

I have some questions/comments. How can I communicate these?

A special email account has been created to receive comments, questions, concerns regarding the new collaborative weekend Mass schedule. When you send to this account, your email will be delivered to each of our Coordinating Council members and to Fr. Erich.

coordinatingcouncil@stthomaspls.org