

July 24, 2018

Dear St. George Parishioners,

We are at a crossroads in the history of the Catholic Church in Southern Illinois. Changes are being made that may impact the viability of our church and parish now and in the future. As you may or may not be aware, the number of ordained priests in the Belleville Diocese has decreased dramatically in the past two decades, and continues to do so. We no longer have a sufficient number of active, ordained priests to celebrate the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation on a regular basis to meet the needs of our people. Please encourage your children and others who are discerning their vocation in life to consider the priesthood, diaconate, and religious life.

A few years ago the Diocese of Belleville embarked on a “Restructuring & Renewal” process that was intended to address the viability of the Catholic Church in the Belleville Diocese. The previous “cluster” program for our parishes, implemented by Bishop Wilton Gregory, was abandoned (even though it was working well in our Cluster of St. Joseph, Lebanon; St. George, New Baden; St. Mary, Trenton; St. Bernard, Albers; & St. Damian, Damiansville), and a new “partnering” program was instituted by Bishop Braxton.

Recently I and Fr. Rascher received a phone call from our Dean/Vicar Foran of the North Central Vicariate, instructing us to change our Sunday Mass schedule immediately. A year ago we changed our Saturday Mass schedule, alternating months between the parishes at 4pm on Saturday. We are now preparing to change our Sunday schedule.

At a June 13, 2018, joint meeting of the Parish Councils of St. George and St. Mary, and the two pastors, it was agreed that the Sunday Mass at St. George would be at 8am, and the Sunday Mass at St. Mary would be at 10:30am. The JOINT decision, agreed to by both parishes was intended to benefit both parishes when the time comes in the near future that both parishes are served by only one ordained priest. However, about two or three weeks later, the St. Mary Parish Council met alone and changed the time of their Sunday Mass from 10:30am to 9:30am. I believe that changes in joint actions made by and involving both parishes should be made in collaboration between the partner parishes. That decision to change has impacted both of our parishes.

Having said that, and after meeting with some of the leadership of St. George after a recent Sunday Mass, we will at this time remain faithful to our agreement. Beginning the first Sunday of August, the Sunday Mass at St. George will be at 8am. However, periodically during the coming months we, the leadership of St. George parish, will re-evaluate this decision/Mass time to assess it's over-all impact on the stability and positive growth of this faith community to determine if and/or what further changes should be taken.

For Your Information ... Thanksgiving Day Mass will be at 9am; Christmas Eve Mass will be at 4pm; Christmas Day Mass will be at 9am; Easter Sunday Masses will remain at 7am and 9am; Memorial Day Mass in 2019 will be at 9am at Resurrection Cemetery. Parish School of Religion will be held in our CLC from 9:10am – 10:10am.

I know this change to a Sunday Mass at 8am may prove to be a hardship to some, especially to families with young children. It is an absolute joy for me when I see so many young children in Mass on Sunday. You parents are to be commended for your efforts to pass on your Catholic Christian faith to your children. I hope you will continue to do your best to make the added sacrifice to attend Saturday/Sunday Mass at St. George with your children.

I know that an 8am Mass is not “convenient” for some of you, and a late Mass is also not convenient for others. This is your church home. Whatever decision you make, it is important that you continue to support your parish with

your time, talent, almsgiving (...to the Giving Tree Food Pantry, Food Voucher Program, PSR, Sister Parish, etc.), and weekly/monthly/annual financial support. ALL of this is absolutely necessary and vital to the present and future viability and growth of St. George Catholic Church in New Baden. This may be a good time for each of us to reassess our commitment to our St. George Catholic Church, and reflect on ways we can strengthen that commitment. Staying up to date with what is happening at St. George is not that difficult. The parish website is being revamped; the Youth Ministry has a Facebook Page; Office Staff spends a lot of time and effort providing us with a weekend bulletin; annual financial information is available both weekly (in the bulletin) and in the Annual Financial Report; your weekly, bi-weekly or monthly contributions can be made by use of the special envelopes you receive in the mail or by a direct withdrawal from your bank account and deposit into the parish account (call Kelly at the parish office for information about this). Should you choose to attend another Catholic Church for Mass, use the envelopes you receive from us to make your gift to your parish. All parishes in the Diocese always forward envelopes that are not for their parish back to the parish for which they are intended.

On other topics: from Nov. 11, 2018 – Nov. 11, 2019 St. George Parish will commemorate our 125th year of service in praise to God, our parishioners, and the broader New Baden Community. It will be a great time for each of us to renew our commitment to our Catholic Christian faith and to this parish. Please participate in the many activities that are being planned, including the Joint Parish Mission beginning Nov. 11 this year.

This year on November 11, Veterans Day, New Baden is the host for the Clinton County annual Veterans Day celebration, and St. George is the host church. Mass will be at 9am.

This Summer we were assigned a newly ordained deacon to our Partnership – Deacon John Mote. Like Deacon John Fridley, they both are assigned to both of the Partnership Parishes. You can expect them both at meetings, assisting at Mass, and however they decide to be involved in parish partnership ministry. Welcome, Deacon Mote, to St. George.

Our Parish School of Religion will begin on Sunday, September 16, 2018, Catechetical Sunday, in our Community Life Center. Class will begin at 9:10am and end at 10:10am. Please register your child(ren) ASAP for the coming school year. The 8th grade Confirmation Class will be meeting at St. Mary, Trenton on Sundays. Watch our weekend bulletin for the time.

Sometime this Autumn, thanks to an anonymous donor, Rev. Gretchen Sterrett who died a year ago and was our Saturday organist for 27+ years will be honored with a permanent memorial on the parish grounds. More information on this later.

Two final items – August 11 is our annual Summer Picnic. Please volunteer to help work to set up the stands, work the day of the picnic, and clean up on Sunday.

Second, please keep me in your prayers. On Monday, August 27 I will have partial cornea transplant surgery. It's no secret I've had trouble seeing for almost a year. Time to get this fixed – I hope and pray.

Thanks for your generous support of all that has been accomplished these past 12 years. We hope to have the work of refurbishing the church windows completed sometime in 2019. Have a great remainder of the Summer.

Sincerely,

Fr. Gene Neff