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Mass

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to leave St. Michael's for another parish assignment and not be replaced.

"The daily Mass used to be among a priest's top priorities, but the reality is, they have so many responsibilities now it's slipped down by necessity," said Joan Workmaster, diocesan director of liturgy.

A growing number of diocesan parishes are trimming their daily Mass schedules. And that causes concern for a segment of Catholics who practice their devotion to the Eucharist several days per week — either by rising early to attend church, slipping out during lunch break or catching Mass just before supper.

"It's going to be very difficult for people who have in their minds the repetition of Masses," Workmaster said.

Workmaster said that the Mass reductions usually begin with evening Masses, which are generally not as heavily attended as Masses earlier in the day. In fact, only a handful of diocesan parishes have evening daily Mass anymore. Saturday-morning Mass, also, has become less frequent due to the many other Masses a priest may have that day (funerals, weddings, anticipatory Sunday Mass).

Nowadays, numerous parishes advise their faithful to check the weekly bulletin or call first because priests — due to vacations, sabbaticals, illnesses, days off or other duties such as funerals — cannot commit to a day-in and day-out Mass schedule.

At Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece, Father Charles Manning, pastor, announced the weekend of Feb. 19-20 that some daily Masses — as well as a Sunday Mass — will be dropped beginning this summer because many Basilian priests, who provide sacramental support at Holy Name, are leaving the Rochester Diocese. At that point, the parish, which had two daily Masses until 1998, will average less than one per day.

"When the Basilians leave, I'm going to be faced with a Mass schedule for two priests," Father Manning explained.

Workmaster said that priests are discouraged from saying more than one weekday Mass per day. But this becomes difficult to adhere to when funerals, school Masses and other special Masses are added on to the regular weekday Mass schedule.

Workmaster further noted that many Catholics believe — mistakenly — that priests are bound by church law to celebrate at least one Mass per day. Yet Canon 276 in the Code of Canon Law states that this practice, while strongly encouraged, is not required: "They are to nourish their spiritual life from the two-fold table of Sacred Scripture and the Eucharist; priests are therefore earnestly invited to offer the sacrifice of the Eucharist daily."

If parishes such as St. Michael's and Holy Name, which have resident priests, struggle to maintain daily Mass, one can only imagine the challenge for parishes without an on-site priest. For instance, in January, Father Paul Tomasso, pastor of five churches on Rochester's west side, eliminated four weekday Masses among those churches when his parochial vicar, Father Donald Curtiss, left for another parish assignment and was not replaced.

With a declining number of priests, Workmaster said, the days are gone when backup support was readily available.

"You used to have a buddy in the rectory or down the street. But we've passed the point where somebody's waiting in the wings," Workmaster said.

Deep meaning

For people who attend church six or seven days per week, attending Mass is as regular a ritual as walking the dog or having a morning cup of coffee. Gilardo, of St. Michael's in Newark, said she wouldn't think of missing daily Mass.

"I can't think of a better way to start the day," she said.

Joe Monahan Sr. said he started going frequently to St. Michael's daily Mass after



Darius Kavaliunas greets Father Charles Manning during the sign of peace at Holy Name of Jesus Church on Feb. 24.

he retired seven years ago.

"I think God has been pretty good to me, and I should sacrifice something," he said.

Meanwhile, Judy Miller has been going to daily Mass for about 25 years, mostly at Holy Name of Jesus in Greece.

"There is the comfort and assurance of having the Lord in your life. It's very peaceful to me," Miller said.

Daily Masses are held either in a parish's main church, where participants are prone to sitting far apart; or in the more intimate setting of a small chapel. Congregations at daily Masses in the diocese can range from a handful of people to several dozen; the numbers rise particularly during Lent.

One popular Mass is the 8 a.m. at St. Anne's in Rochester. According to Father Frank Lioi, pastor, congregations average about 40 dedicated participants.

"These people are early risers. And, it adds structure to their lives," Father Lioi said. "Mass is sort of a pillar of the day. They tend to be solid, involved parishioners."

Father Lioi noted that his crowd is mostly senior citizens. "I think the older they get, the spiritual things have deeper meaning," he said.

On the other hand, St. Anne parishioner Mary Reilich said she regularly sees young adults, also, at 8 a.m. Mass. Noting that the University of Rochester is nearby, she remarked with a smile, "You see them in droves during exam periods."

Though mornings are the most common time for daily Masses, some parishes in the city of Rochester, as well as cities and large villages in other parts of the diocese, offer noontime and evening Masses.

"There are people who give up their lunch hour every day for this," Workmaster said.

Extra devotion is a part of many daily Masses: A rosary is said just prior to Mass at St. Michael's in Newark, and St. Anne's in Rochester prays a rosary immediately following its daily Mass.

Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, in his book *The Holy Longing - The Search for a Christian Spirituality*, remarked that daily Mass participants come from a variety of backgrounds. These people, he wrote, often consist of "some nuns, some unemployed people, a lot of retired women, some retired men, a few young persons, some housewives, and a motley collection of nurses, businessmen, secretaries, and other such professionals."

Father Rolheiser, a Canadian priest, describes their draw to the daily Mass as a need for "a ritual, a deep powerful one that sustains a person ... a coming together which keeps us, in ways that we cannot explain rationally, from falling apart."

Weekday Masses provide social, as well as spiritual, outlets. For instance, many in

the 8 a.m. St. Anne crowd regularly convene after Mass at a diner across the street. The group ranges from four to 19 people on any given day. The diner also serves as an informal meeting room where they can plan church-related activities.

Father Manning said he looks forward to seeing his daily 9 a.m. contingent. The Holy Name of Jesus pastor said he was recently given a card signed by more than 30 "regulars," along with a pair of suspenders.

"I've lost some weight," he explained.

Miller has gone mostly to the 9 a.m. Mass at Holy Name of Jesus since the 6:30 a.m. Mass was dropped there in 1998. However, she said, the 6:30 crowd still gets together for breakfast once in a while to renew the close bonds they've developed over the years.

"You get to know what's going on in people's lives," Miller said. "It's a real caring support group."

Tough realities

But Miller's group was forced to readjust in the fall of 1998, when the late Bishop Dennis W. Hickey stopped celebrating the 9 a.m. daily Mass. Father Manning, who had just arrived as pastor, decided to cut back to one daily Mass, and eliminated the 6:30 a.m. Mass.

Such reductions, Father Manning said, "may be seen as an inconvenience. But we're no longer in the business of convenient Masses."

Beginning this summer, due to dwindling backup priest support, Father Manning plans to cut the Friday and Saturday 9 a.m. Masses and replace them with some sort of prayer service conducted by a member of the parish community other than a priest.

Several daily Masses were eliminated when six churches in the Finger Lakes clustered this past summer, according to Father Philip Billotte, pastor. He explained that he and two parochial vicars, Fathers Peter Deckman and Sean Garriety, CSB, reside at St. Michael's Church in Penn Yan and must cover a wide geographic area. Most affected by the reduction was St. Theresa's Church in Stanley, which went from a Monday-through-Friday daily Mass to one weekday Mass, at 9 a.m. on Friday.

These examples, Workmaster said, stand in stark contrast to trends from earlier this century. "It was nothing to have four or five Masses per day," she said.

Many times, retired priests provide invaluable support for daily Masses. Yet it's not wise to become dependent on them, Workmaster pointed out.

"For the older priests, it's been their way of life every day. They're going to want to do it," Workmaster said. "They're only too happy to be of assistance, but if their health

fails, a parish usually can't replace them."

Alternatives

One way for worshipers to cope with reductions in daily Masses at their own parishes is to attend Mass elsewhere. Miller said that since Holy Name of Jesus' 6:30 a.m. Mass was discontinued, she has attended 6:30 a.m. and 6:25 a.m. Masses at nearby Sacred Heart Cathedral and St. John the Evangelist, respectively.

And Lois Demitry, a regular attendant at St. Anne's 8 a.m. Mass, observed that many non-parishioners come to that Mass.

"We see several from Our Lady of Good Counsel, which doesn't have a daily Mass. We welcome them," she said.

The public is also welcome at daily Masses celebrated at motherhouses, monasteries and healthcare facilities. "Everything about the liturgy would be the same," Workmaster said.

Another option is for neighboring parishes to stagger their daily Mass times so that people have a better chance of attending one that fits their schedule. For instance, Father Manning said that when he heard neighboring St. Charles Borromeo is considering reducing its daily-Mass schedule from two (8 and 11:30 a.m.) to one, he asked St. Charles to steer away from a new Mass time of 9 a.m. so as not to conflict with Holy Name's daily Mass.

An increasing number of parishes are also turning to Communion services and prayer services, so they can continue to gather daily but without a priest presence.

Workmaster said that the diocese discourages Communion services because "that would require the reservation in the tabernacle of a large number of consecrated hosts." Normally, she said, those hosts are designated for the sick, not a large gathering in the church. Even so, she acknowledged that many parishes in this diocese nonetheless conduct Communion services on weekdays, with the blessings of their pastor.

"I think it's very difficult for people to tear themselves away from the presumption that they're always going to receive Communion," she remarked.

Workmaster said that weekday slots can be filled by lay presiders who are trained for Sunday worship in the absence of a priest. Yet even the availability of trained presiders and deacons, Workmaster emphasized, doesn't change the parameters discouraging Eucharist at daily services without a priest.

Instead, Workmaster said that a morning or evening prayer service, such as the Liturgy of the Hours, is the preferred alternative to daily Mass. These services generally consist of hymns, psalms, readings, intercessions and other prayers.

However, anything other than a daily Mass at one's own parish may not be seen as a viable alternative for those who are unaccustomed to the concept.

"I don't want to call it a poor substitute, but a prayer service just isn't the Mass," said Surber, of St. Michael's in Newark.

Surber proposed her own alternative: "The priest should be relieved of all his administrative duties, because only priests can say Mass."

"It would seem to me that would be a better use of them," agreed Laura Sallijacobsen, another frequent daily Mass attendee at St. Michael's.

Father Clifford recognizes that the recent disruption of daily Mass schedules is difficult for his parishioners, saying, "As the landscape changes, you just try to be very kind to them in course of the process." However, he also said that his parish will continue to have at least one daily Mass most of the year — a much better scenario than in several diocesan parishes.

"As raw as the nerves are now here, other parishes went through this a long, long time ago," Father Clifford said.

Workmaster, meanwhile, said that prayer services are certainly better than no worship gathering at all.

"You want to stay together and pray as a community," she said. "It's going to mean different possibilities. The spirit is moving in the world in a way we don't understand."