

# Parishes reduce number of weekend Masses

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

As the new year begins, Catholics throughout the Diocese of Rochester have about 36 fewer weekend Masses available to attend than they did two years ago. And more Masses are to be dropped in the next couple of years, according to diocesan officials and pastors.

The declining number of priests continues to drive, indeed, to accelerate, the decline in available Masses. Five years ago, 58 percent of all diocesan parishes had a resident pastor serving the parish, whereas currently only 52 percent of all parishes have a priest-pastor who resides at the parish and serves that parish alone. That percentage is projected to drop below 50 in the next five years, according to William L. Pickett,

diocesan director of pastoral planning.

Also, parishes must follow the Catholic Church's canon law that priests should celebrate no more than three regularly slated Masses each weekend. It is a law that priests seem to support and for good reason, according to Father Robert J. Schrader, pastor of St. Mary's Parish, Auburn. His parish is one of eight in the Auburn area that collectively agreed to drop a total of eight Masses between last summer and Jan. 6.

It takes a lot out of a priest to prepare for a Mass, he noted, from writing a new homily each week to meeting with various parish staff members and volunteers to plan the weekly celebration.



"The Mass is supposed to be the center of our day as Christians, the center of our day as priests, and it's hard to have two or three centers," he said.

That point was echoed by Father Louis A. Vasile, pastor of St. Alphonsus, Auburn.

"Quality goes up when quantity goes down," he noted.

Many retired priests willingly help out at various diocesan parishes. However, it is diocesan policy that parishes not factor in such priests when creating Mass schedules because such priests are free to leave their post-retirement ministries at any time.

Groups of parishes have taken such factors into account the past three years in meeting to implement Pastoral Planning

for the New Millennium. The planning, for a future with fewer priests, generally has involved collaboration on liturgy schedules, staffing and programs.

Parishes and planning groups have used a variety of methods to determine their new weekend Mass schedules.

For example, St. Mary's held a vote in July on a new schedule that decreases the parishes' weekend Masses from six to five as of Jan. 6. Meanwhile, Blessed Sacrament Parish, Rochester, surveyed parishioners and found that 18 percent attended its 4:30 p.m. Saturday Mass, the lowest percentage to attend a weekend Mass, according to Father Robert Kennedy, pastor. That Mass will be eliminated Jan. 13, he said. The freed time may allow the church to slate more weddings on Saturdays given that 37

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## Pope's Day of Peace message

Pope John Paul II's message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, Jan. 1, 2001, titled, "Dialogue Between Cultures for a Civilization of Love and Peace," was released at the Vatican Dec. 14. Excerpts of the Vatican text follow:

1. At the dawn of a new millennium, there is growing hope that relationships between people will be increasingly inspired by the ideal of a truly universal brotherhood. Unless this ideal is shared, there will be no way to ensure a stable peace. There are many signs which suggest that this conviction is becoming more deeply rooted in people's minds. The importance of fraternity is proclaimed in the great "charters" of human rights; it is embodied in great international institutions, particularly the United Nations; and it is called for, as never before, by the process of globalization which is leading to a progressive unification of the economy, culture and society.

For their part, the followers of the different religions are ever more conscious of the fact that a relationship with the one God, the common Father of all, cannot fail to bring about a greater sense of human brotherhood and a more fraternal life together. In God's revelation in Christ, this principle finds a radical expression: "He who does not love does not know God; for God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

2. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that thick clouds overshadow these bright hopes. Humanity is beginning this new chapter of its history with still open wounds. In many regions it is beset by bitter and bloody conflicts and is struggling with increasing difficulty to maintain solidarity between people of different cultures and civilizations living together in the same territory.

We all know how hard it is to settle differences between parties



Reuters/CNS

**Pope John Paul II blesses thousands of people Dec. 25 at St. Peter's Square where he delivered his annual Christmas "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) address.**

when ancient hatreds and serious problems which admit of no easy solution create an atmosphere of anger and exasperation. But no less dangerous for the future of peace would be the inability to confront intelligently the problems posed by a new social configuration resulting in many countries from accelerated migration and the unprecedented situation of people of different cultures and civilizations living side by side.

3. I therefore consider it urgent to invite believers in Christ, together with all men and women of good will, to reflect on the theme of dialogue between cultures and traditions. This dialogue is the obligatory path to the building of a reconciled world, a world able to look with serenity to its own future. This is a theme which is crucial to the pursuit of peace. I am pleased that the United Nations organization has called attention to this urgent need by declaring 2001 the "International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations."

Naturally, I do not believe that there can be easy or readily applicable solutions to a problem like this.

... But for this very reason I see the usefulness of a shared reflection on these issues. With this intention I

confine myself here to offering some guidelines, listening to what the Spirit of God is saying to the churches (cf. Rev 2:7) and to all of humanity at this decisive hour of its history.

### Mankind and its different cultures

4. Reflecting upon the human situation, one is always amazed at the complexity and diversity of human cultures. Each of them is dis-

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