

Office of the Bishop

Diocese of Brooklyn

310 Prospect Park West
Brooklyn, New York 11215

June 2017

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, the faithful of Brooklyn and Queens,

Our faith is centered on the Eucharist and God's Word. Vatican II reminded us that the Liturgy is the "source and summit" of the life of the Church. It is meant to start our week, sending us out on mission to the world. It is the source of our life - God's life in us. It also should be that high point or summit towards which we aim. We participate in the Liturgy to worship and to receive God's Grace, to draw close to God and join together with our brothers and sisters through the sacrament.

In our parishes today, priests often celebrate Masses each week in more than one language, often working to celebrate in a language not their own. That is a challenge especially for homilies (as it also is in one-to-one pastoral work such as counseling or Confession). We seek to welcome the immigrant and where possible, priests have learned the language needed in their specific community in order to serve the newcomers. As you know, the demographics change rather rapidly in our diocese in Brooklyn and Queens; a language Mass that might have been essential in a parish 30 years ago could be serving few attendees today.

Allow me to share with you some statistics:

- In 1995, Mass attendance in our Diocese was reported at an average of 286,000 people per weekend. In 2016, the average was reported at 220,000. That represents a decrease of nearly 23 percent in the last 21 years. This decline in Mass attendance means that in some parishes we have large capacity churches and a significantly reduced Mass size.
- At that time, there was a higher number of priests living and working in our parishes. Due to a large number of priest retirements and deaths in recent years, there are fewer priests serving per parish. This results in overextending the other responsibilities of our priests.
- Also, the reduced number of clergy with bilingual skills further complicates the ability to best serve parishes with specific language needs.

There is no simple solution to this issue. In most of our parishes it is evident that we do not need so many separate Masses to accommodate the number of parishioners in attendance at Sunday Eucharist each week. In many situations, it seems clear that a reduction in the number of weekend Masses is necessary. An adjustment in the Mass schedule can strengthen the community, increasing participation in the remaining Masses. Truly, we wish to bring our people together.

I am asking pastors and administrators throughout the diocese in Brooklyn and Queens, in consultation with their pastoral councils, to review and evaluate their Mass schedules. In most parishes, the number of Masses celebrated each weekend could be reduced by at least one or more Masses, depending on the number of people attending and the capacity of each church.

Additionally, I would ask that there be some coordination of schedules with neighboring parishes. In a special way, I ask that there be at least one Sunday evening Mass within each deanery, to accommodate those faithful who due to other obligations may not be able to attend a Saturday evening or Sunday morning Mass.

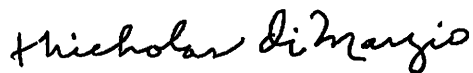
I know that some parishioners will be directly affected when these changes take place in the Weekend Mass schedule. Change is never easy. But our hope is to encourage more vibrant, joyful celebrations of the Eucharist, bringing larger numbers of the faithful together to give thanks and praise to God. I ask for your patience and understanding as adjustments are made to your parish schedules. I also ask you to please make the personal sacrifices which may be required to join together with your sisters and brothers at the weekend Eucharist. We must keep in mind that everything we do as Church, we do for the praise and glory of God.

As previously mentioned, the Liturgy is the source and summit of the life of the Church. As we move forward with this initiative of examining our weekend Mass schedules, my prayer is that we may increase the involvement of our people, not only in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, but also in all other aspects of parish life.

Pastors and administrators are asked to send any proposed changes directly to their Vicar and together we will evaluate all of them. My hope is to receive these proposals in the near future. I am aware that some Mass intentions are already in place.

Thanking you in advance for your understanding and with an assurance of my continued remembrance of you in prayer and in the celebration of the Eucharist, I am

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nicholas DiMarzio".

Most Reverend Nicholas DiMarzio, Ph.D., D.D.
Bishop of Brooklyn