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*The three Catholic parishes in the city of Ashtabula enjoy a truly cooperative relationship. Many of our programs, policies, and Sacramental celebrations are done together, as is our support and dedication to Catholic education through Saints John and Paul School.*

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*Parishes of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Youngstown, Ohio*

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*The Mission of the "Transition Team" is to preserve the integrity, autonomy, and traditions of each of the three Catholic Parishes in Ashtabula, while working to ensure that the faithful of the entire Catholic Community is pastorally well-served.*

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## **A BRIEF RECAP OF THE PROGRAMS, POLICIES, MINISTRIES AND PASTORAL RESOURCES ALREADY BEING SHARED BY THE THREE PARISHES OF ASHTABULA**

### ***"An Active Parishioner"***

An active parishioner is one who is: a) officially registered in a parish, and b) actively participates in the life and mission of the Parish and the Universal Church.

By "actively participating," it is meant, among other things that:

- the person/family is registered in the parish (i.e., as documented by official parish records);
- the person/family is attending Mass regularly (i.e., weekly Sunday Mass, plus Holy Days of Obligation);
- the person/family helps the parish through their stewardship gift of time, talent, and treasure;
- the person/family is involved in the religious education programs, social activities, and service projects of the parish.

For nearly 10 years, the three parishes have agreed to use this statement when it comes to such things as preparing and celebrating the Sacraments of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage, and determining parishioner tuition rates at Sts. John & Paul School.

- ✓ For the celebration of Baptism for infants and young children, the three parishes share the same preparation policy. The preparation class rotates from parish to parish every other month.
- ✓ Children preparing for their First Reconciliation and First Communion attend Tri-Parish classes, in addition to their regular CCD classes or religion classes at SSJP.
- ✓ Students preparing for their Confirmation also attend Tri-Parish classes, in addition to their regular CCD classes or religion classes at SSJP.

[It might be worth noting that these Sacraments are celebrations of and for the entire Community, not just for one family or group of individuals. For this reason, these celebrations are properly celebrated within the context on a community, not as private functions.]

- ✓ High School Youth Ministry (i.e., the LifeTeen Program)
- ✓ Couples preparing for Marriage will experience the same procedures and meetings regardless of the parish at which they will be married.

In the next few weeks, the Transition Team and the Tri-Parish Staff will be compiling a more detailed list of our shared policies and programs, with the end goal of publishing them in full for the entire Community.

*[While researching Mass schedules and policies across the country, this Bishop's letter came up on my screen. It is as valid for our diocese (and for our current situation) as it is for Scranton, PA. Read on....]*

September 15, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

During this Year of the Eucharist, I have been praying in thanksgiving to God for the wonderful gift of His Son's real presence among us who are privileged to celebrate and adore the Most Holy Eucharist. As your Bishop I am deeply consoled by the devotion that so many Catholics have to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and by the generous zeal with which our priests feed your souls with the Bread of Life.

Yes, we are richly blessed, and our Diocese of Scranton has not yet felt the more painful effect of the sharply declining number of priests that has already deprived thousands of our fellow Catholics throughout the world of even a regular Sunday celebration of Holy Mass. And so, above all, we must pray to the Lord of the Harvest to call young men to serve His Church as priests, and all of us, but especially parents and family members, must encourage sons and brothers to listen for God's call and respond to it generously when it comes.

One of the reasons why we have not yet seriously felt the pinch of the shortage of priests is a relatively hidden one, and it is the purpose of this letter to bring it into the open for your prayerful consideration and understanding. That reason is that our priests are very often celebrating several Masses on the same day. It is the Church's ancient discipline and practice that, except for very special occasions like Christmas and All Souls Day, her priests celebrate only one Mass a day. So august is God's gift of the Eucharist, so important is the spiritual preparation for it, so careful and attentive must its celebration be, and so essential the thanksgiving to be made afterward as priests carry forth its grace to the rest of their ministry, that the multiplication of this central act in a priest's daily life runs the risk of diminishing the value he places on it. Such a danger imperils the whole community of faith along with its priest. The law, therefore, is not an arbitrary one. It provides an essential means of fostering the holiness of the Church's faithful.

And yet the Church, ever solicitous for the spiritual needs of the faithful and mindful of the shortage of clergy, gives its bishops the authority to permit priests, for a just cause, to celebrate two Masses on weekdays and, for a true pastoral necessity, even three Masses on a Sunday or holy day of obligation. Our priests have had this permission and they now have it from me. However, I cannot allow the limits of this permission to be exceeded. As your Bishop, I must ask you to accept the decision of your priest when he tells you that he cannot offer another Mass on a particular day.

Appeals to practicality, convenience, or long-term contrary custom must not be allowed to derail this effort. All of us – but I, especially, as your Bishop – are gravely obliged to be stewards of the Church's mysteries and the age-old discipline that has been fashioned to preserve them.

Saturdays present us with a special challenge in this matter. Since it is a weekday, each priest, even with the special permission, may celebrate only two Masses. Parishes will therefore be obliged to rethink their priorities. Should the Saturday weekday morning Mass be eliminated in favor of a Saturday evening vigil Mass? Can nuptial Masses be scheduled on Friday evening instead of Saturday? Need every Church have a Saturday vigil Mass? Can neighboring parishes cooperate in the design of Mass schedules that will provide reasonable availability of Mass for all living in a particular area?

To allow sufficient time for prayer, instruction, and planning, I am delegating to the Vicars General and the Episcopal Vicars, the extraordinary faculty to dispense from the law in individual cases of the greatest necessity so that a priest may offer an additional Mass to what the Church law allows. This faculty will expire on December 3, 2006, the First Sunday of Advent. After that date, dispensation from the law will be granted only on the rarest occasion.

Please be assured of my prayers for the whole Diocese, that our experience of honoring this discipline will help us grow in our hunger of the Eucharist, our reverence for its great mystery, and our commitment to pray and work for the promotion of priestly vocations so that this great gift of God may always sustain us on our journey toward the eternal Banquet of God's kingdom.

With kind personal regards, I am,

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Joseph F. Martino, D.D., Hist. E.D.

Bishop of Scranton, PA