

IMPORTANT LETTER TO OUR ENGLISH SPEAKING COMMUNITY

My dear Parishioners:

I am writing this letter to the English speaking community of Holy Innocents Parish. It has to do with the schedule of Sunday Masses and a proposal for a change in that schedule which, if implemented, will not affect the Spanish Masses. At the outset, I want to be clear that this proposal is just that. No final decision has been made. I'll return to this point later.

Here is the situation: I have been the lone priest in this parish for several years now. I do receive wonderful help from Father Alan Bernander, O. Praem., but his involvement in the parish is limited to English on Sunday mornings exclusively. Everything else rightfully falls to me. I have the parish school which requires a lot of my attention, I have religious education programs, plus the usual priestly work of hearing confessions, counseling people, visiting the sick, and preparing couples for marriage. On top of all this there is the administrative burden of running a parish which has become evermore complex.

Earlier this year, my workload increased significantly when I became the "unofficial" Catholic chaplain of the 700 bed Long Beach Memorial Hospital. The hospital had not had a Catholic priest chaplain since December 2016. Since the hospital falls within the boundaries of our parish, the Archdiocese informed the non-denominational chaplaincy of the hospital to call Holy Innocents whenever a priest was needed! Ever since then I have made daily trips to Memorial. Many of those trips have been quite involved and I end up spending several hours there visiting patients who need what only a priest can give. It is beautiful work and I have been blessed by the experience but being the "Catholic priest chaplain" at a large hospital is a full time job! I already have a full time "job," namely, pastor of Holy Innocents and its only priest.

There was a very fine young priest whom I



have known long before he became a priest who was looking for an assignment in the Archdiocese. I had hoped for a time, perhaps naively, that this excellent priest might have been assigned to Holy Innocents as an assistant on July 1. This would have been a huge help to me and together we could have taken care of the needs of the parish as well as those of the hospitals. Unfortunately, the Archdiocese chose not to assign him to us and now that very good priest has been welcomed to another diocese in the Midwest. What a loss for us and for the Archdiocese.

The point of all this is to simply say that I have finally resigned myself to the fact that our Holy Innocents will remain for the foreseeable future a ONE PRIEST PARISH. And this is the reality which you and I must squarely face.

The current Mass schedule includes an English Vigil Mass at the school hall on Saturday afternoon and four Sunday Masses, two Spanish and two English. Two of the three English Masses are offered in the school hall. When Father Alan is unable to be here, more often than not, I end up saying the five Masses (in spite of my best efforts to obtain priestly help). Moreover, since Father Alan does not speak Spanish, I have in effect become almost exclusively the Spanish speaking priest and it is rare that I have the opportunity to offer a Sunday Mass in English. With the schedule as it is currently arranged, I almost never have a chance to spend time with parishioners on Sundays. I am always off and running to the next Mass. I love saying Mass in Spanish but, frankly, I feel somewhat cut off from you, the English speaking community.

Taking all of this into consideration, I am praying about a change in our Sunday schedule. (Keep in mind that this change would not affect the 5 o'clock English Mass on Saturdays in the school hall). **Here is what I am proposing:** The 7 o'clock and 1 o'clock Spanish Masses will remain (hence, I am not translating this letter into

Spanish). This change would involve combining the 9 o'clock and 11 o'clock English Masses into one Mass: a new 10 o'clock Mass which would be offered in the church.

The advantages of this proposed schedule are numerous. **First,** I will be able to spend time after each Mass to be with parishioners over coffee and donuts (or café y pan dulce). This for me, personally, is a big plus. I currently do not have the luxury of "hanging out" with parishioners after Mass because I am always pressed to leave for the next Mass. **Second,** we will not have the added expense—which is significant—of running the AC in the school hall. There will be just one venue for the Sunday Masses. **Third,** there will be ample time to hear Confessions before each Mass. Holy Innocents parishioners have grown accustomed to this opportunity to go to Confession on Sunday. People come from other parishes as well to avail themselves of this Sacrament. **Fourth,** we will not have the added expense of the stipend for the Sunday supply priest, which will also be a help especially if, at least initially, the collection takes a dive.

The fact is the two Sunday English Masses for whatever reason, do not draw a large crowd unlike the Spanish Masses which are packed. In terms of operating costs as well as in terms of priest personnel, combining the two Masses into one location makes a lot of sense. I recognize that changes of this sort are always difficult. We all get used to a certain routine. But, honestly, if the attendance at the English Masses was better I have no doubt that I would not be considering the possibility of merging the two.

I know that the 11 o'clock Mass folks are used to their school hall. It has become a sort of second home and no doubt, if this proposed schedule change is implemented, some will regrettably opt to attend Mass elsewhere. Their objection is that there is limited parking at the church. Perhaps you were not aware that there was a time when the city offered us the property where the Daryle Black Memorial Park now stands (behind the church). The

idea was to convert the then vacant lot into additional parking but the pastor at the time was not interested in the offer and the opportunity was lost. The good news is that due to our parking limitations our neighbors down the street at Stricklin-Snively Mortuary have graciously allowed our parishioners to use their parking lot, which is just a half block from the church. By the way, there is a parish in Long Beach that has no parking, St. Bartholomew's. There the faithful have found a way to overcome this challenge and their Masses are well attended.

In short, this proposed schedule will be more practical given our current circumstances. If, sadly, some of our Mass goers choose to go elsewhere, whatever the shortfall in the collection that may result from their departure, this will very likely be compensated by lowering the expenses incurred by operating two Mass venues and by eliminating the stipend for auxiliary priest help. This arrangement will enable me, the spiritual Father of this community, to be closer to my flock since I will be the priest for all my parishioners, not just the Spanish speaking, and I will have time after the Masses to be with them in an informal setting.

Let me reiterate that NO FINAL DECISION HAS BEEN MADE about this proposal. I do want to hear from you about it. You may write me but I ask that the letters (or emails) be signed and that contact information be included. Anonymous letters or emails will not be read. I invite you to join me in praying about this. I will take your input and bring it to the parish council members at a future meeting and invite their response to this proposal as well. I am grateful to be your pastor and be assured that I do pray for you and your intentions daily.

And thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy but important letter.

Father G. Peter Irving III
Pastor
June 25, 2017