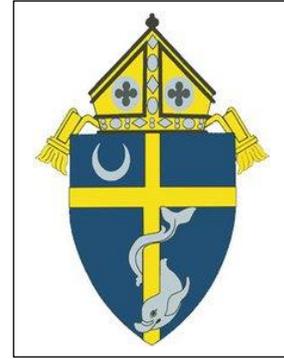


Diocese of Syracuse  
240 East Onondaga Street  
Syracuse, New York 13202

Episcopal Vicar for Parishes  
4 March 2015



Dear Fathers and Deacons, Greetings in Peace!

I hope that the Lenten season is providing many graces for you, your ministry, and the people that you serve. **This letter contains two elements: 1) an update on the 2/28 facilitator meeting, and 2) reflections on the development of a Mass schedule that allows for mutual support.**

### I: Facilitators

This note is an update. Last Saturday, **February 28**, Sister Laura Bufano, Brother Ed Falsey, Christine Werbeck and I had the joy of meeting with the **PCA Pastoral Planning facilitators**. The session included:

- An opportunity for the facilitators to network with each other, and
- An opportunity to share the best practices and biggest challenges of their roles.
- An opportunity to ask questions and receive clarifications, and,
- A training session on ways to deal with resistance and conflict

The facilitators are expressing a desire to meet periodically for similar collaborations. They have asked that the responses to their questions be posted on the **diocesan website**. Before these responses are posted, we want you to have a copy of them. A copy will be sent e-mailed to you soon.

### II. Mass schedule development

Among the most significant questions was a request for clarity with regard to the **Mass Schedule** change requested by Bishop Cunningham in his October letter. For your reflection, conversations and discernment, I want to share what was shared with the facilitators about the schedule. First, there are two schedules. One for current use and one to be used after your area undergoes the realignments projected in the Bishop's October letters. These discussions are meant to address all parishes, large and small, alike.

**The current concern is the creation of Mass schedules that allow priests to easily cover each other for sickness, emergency, retreat, or vacation.** Several factors drive this concern.

1. First, the most recent planning process revealed that based on building size and the number of worshippers at each weekend Mass, we have 40 to 50% more weekend Masses than are needed to effectively serve parishioners. The two challenges with this fact are everyone wants a 5 PM on

Saturday and a 10 AM on Sunday. This is coupled with an apparently greater loyalty to Mass times than to parishes. We all strive to provide weekend worship that engages full, conscious, active participation in the life of our local/global faith community.

2. At the moment, the number of incardinated diocesan priests serving full-time in the diocese and available for weekends is 112. We are fortunate to enjoy the supportive ministry of a number of our senior/retired - pastors/priests, along with the positive presence of our many international priests, Franciscans, Jesuits, and several of our brothers from other dioceses. The current reality urges us to assure that the Eucharistic nature of our community be meaningfully sustained. Thus, pastoral care areas have been asked to restructure their area Mass schedules to assure that priests can cover each other in providing weekend worship, even when a priest is sick, facing an emergency or on vacation. Yes, this will call for a significant level of collegiality among us.
3. The ability of regional vicars and the chancery to provide weekend coverage, particularly on the occasions of illness or emergencies, has been seriously eroded by the diminished number of Eucharistic celebrants. The scheduled use of "Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest" is not an option. Thus, as a presbyterate, our care for the diocese with our Bishop, now calls us to a view of ministry that reaches beyond the parochial, with the hope that a mutual ministry to the area may be sustaining to our parishes.
4. There are several places that cannot consolidate Masses, i.e., the Cathedral, and locations that already are served by only one weekend liturgy. There are other places with one Mass on Saturday and one on Sunday where a combination will put the Church beyond its seating capacity. The request is to create schedules that allow priests to assist each other, thus, the planning process needs to look at both the scheduling of Mass times and the number of Masses in each location.
5. If you have already done this work, you need not "re-invent the wheel." We do ask that you share the new PCA weekend Mass schedule with the Office of Pastoral Planning and the Office of Communications (for the diocesan website), ideally by May 1. This submission is for information, the PCA is the source of approval.

Where do we move forward on this journey?

**Bishop Cunningham has asked that we arrange our Mass schedules in a way that offers mutual support.** This may be accomplished in a number of ways. For instance, the pastoral care area, may determine that neighbors should collaborate at this time or the group can determine to create a PCA Mass schedule. If the PCA is large, pastors may prefer the former. If the PCA is small, the pastor may need to call on a small neighboring PCA to assist designing a schedule that allows coverage.

**We have been suggesting that pastors and their planning groups design the schedule so that catechesis and preparation may occur this spring.** This would allow the preliminary use of the new schedule for the summer or for a period mutually agreed upon by the pastors. In the fall of 2015, this schedule may be tweaked or modified, if necessary. After further catechesis, the new schedules can be

initiated simultaneously, perhaps as we enter 2016. We hope that the combination of catechesis and collaborative effort will sustain parishioners in their parish.

One further factor, if the relative size of parishes and difficulty in combining Masses becomes serious issue, we ask that you call Sister Laura, Brother Ed, or me for assistance. We are all in this together. Let us support one another for the sake of a healthy presbyterate and a thriving local church.

Blessings and Happy Lenting,

Msgr. Jim Lang  
Vicar for Parishes