

Some Questions and Answers About Clustering

There have been some persistent questions about the clustering of St. Clement and St. Joseph Parishes that I wish to address. Most were submitted to our question box and continue to be asked. Some are easy to answer; others require some thought and planning. We now have active Parish Councils and Liturgy Committees in both parishes that can help with these decisions. The cooperation of all parishioners is needed to make this cluster work.

When the new mass schedule was published, questions arose about the reduction to three masses between the two parishes. The French were upset to find that the mass in French at St. Joseph had been eliminated. We have tried to address this concern by alerting the Bishop to the need for a diocesan policy in regard to French services and by the formation of a French Language Committee to present the situation and needs to the Episcopal Vicar for the French. This meeting has taken place and we are now waiting for a response.

Some were concerned about the union of the two Saturday vigil masses into one, to take place at St. Joseph Parish. This was also a concern of the cluster committee. We had a mediator come in to help us with the decision. Looking at the numbers it became clear that this was the proper choice and so it was accepted unanimously. It was also clear that Sunday mass times had to change to accommodate one priest moving between parishes. It was decided that 9:30 was the earliest and 11:30 the latest that mass could be. Something that we should consider is that, whatever mass you attend, your parish affiliation does not change. If parishioners from St. Clement come to the Saturday evening mass or if St. Joseph parishioners choose to go to the 9:30 at St. Clement, they do not need to change parishes. In fact we are looking into the idea of a ministry exchange so that those who have exercised their ministry as readers or communion ministers at one parish may decide to offer their services at the other. As always, envelopes are returned to the parish of issue. **(This makes it especially important to use envelopes or pre-authorized debit.)**

People also had questions about sacramental preparation. At present, preparation for Baptism is remaining the same in each parish. I would like to look at combining the best of the methods used in both parishes when I get the chance. However, the more important areas for coming together are for Confirmation, First Reconciliation, and First Communion. These sacraments require preparing large numbers of children and, because of our French schools, in two languages. This poses problems of logistics and planning. Fortunately, we have the help of Ms. Rebecca Bondy as pastoral worker. She has worked on these programs for more than five years and has developed methods to work according to the model of school, parish, and family.

Over the years, we have tended to leave more and more of sacramental preparation to the schools. However, changes in demands on teachers and the fact that teachers often do not live in the parishes of their students have convinced me that we need to re-involve parishes, and most especially families, in preparation. Sacraments may be a part of the school curriculum but they are celebrated in parishes by families. For this reason, much of the preparation for these sacraments takes place in homes. The parish gatherings need space and, as arrangements were already made with St. Joseph School, and as we had the hall in the basement of the church, and since St. Clement would be unavailable for part of the time, along with the fact that the numbers would be high this first year, I decided to have the parish meetings at St. Joseph. Any such endeavor requires many volunteers. Unfortunately, very few came forward from St. Clement. This left some feeling that their parish had been left out. I am sorry for that, but I hope that next year we can make use of St. Clement and St. Ursule School for some meetings and that St. Clement parishioners will become more involved. At any rate, celebration of the sacraments of Penance and Communion will be in the parish of the candidate. For Confirmation, the Bishop's office had already informed St. Clement that, because of numbers, their candidates would have to go in with another parish. Within the cluster, the obvious choice is St. Joseph. I believe that the celebration went very well this year.

As we draw closer to the full implementation of our cluster, co-operation is more important than ever. It is important to remember that, although we are proud of our buildings, a parish is not a building – it is a community of faith! Wherever we worship, whether at St. Joseph, St. Clement, or in the gym at St. Ursule, we are the living stones that form the Church of Christ.