



Christ the King-St. Francis de Sales Parish

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September 3, 2022

Dear parishioners of Christ the King-St. Francis de Sales Parish,

If you have been at Mass recently you have likely heard that Bishop Walkoviak has named me the pastor of St. Bernadette of Lourdes-St. Margaret Mary Alacoque Parish, Stanton/Edmore in addition to appointing me to another six year term as your pastor. I am thankful for the way many of you have expressed your support for me and continue to keep me in your prayers; for that I am truly thankful.

In order to better understand the relationship we have between the two parishes, I asked Bishop Walkoviak to clarify to which he said, "Two free standing parishes under the direction of one pastor are called a cluster." I thought I would include the definition of a parish cluster from the diocese's website; "A parish cluster is two or more parishes designated by the bishop to share a pastor while remaining separate entities. The parishes in a cluster will plan to share staff, programs and ministries as well as form a regional or cluster pastoral council. Each parish must retain a separate finance council but these groups may meet and plan together." My hope and prayer is that both parishes will be strengthened by working together.

Bishop is aware that he asking more of me and there will be some adjustments that will be necessary. Currently between the two parishes there are five weekend Masses and Bishop's expectation is that there can be only three once we establish a new Mass schedule. The parish in Stanton/Edmore will have a single weekend Mass and we will have two here. This means that there will be a single Mass at Christ the King and a single one at St. Francis de Sales. As we prepare for these adjustments in our parish's liturgical life I have worked with the councils of both our parish and the parish in Stanton/Edmore.

With the councils and listening to the thoughts and ideas of many parishioners, different configurations were considered. I realize that some of you will have to make adjustments to your Mass attendance. The reality is that there are more priests retiring and becoming unavailable than are being ordained. We are feeling this crunch like other parishes. I truly am thankful for your understanding.

I first met with the councils of St. Bernadette of Lourdes-St. Margaret Mary Alacoque. They are reducing their weekend service down to one Mass, and I was not sure what people were thinking that would allow their parish to thrive. There were many considerations such as the distance between churches, travel in the winter, how to make the new configuration be workable for me, etc. We talked about how to elicit input from parishioners and ultimately the consensus was that a Saturday evening Mass would work well for them.

In meeting here with the Pastoral/Finance Council we accepted their proposal as it allows both of the parishes a way to thrive and hopefully grow. Please note that I plan to offer confessions before the Saturday evening Mass in Stanton from 4-4:30 and before the 9am Mass in Lakeview from 8-8:30. Wednesdays, at Howard City, will remain at 6-6:30 pm.

The new Mass schedule will be as follows:

Saturday, 5pm Mass at St. Bernadette of Lourdes Church in Stanton

Sunday, 9am Mass at St. Francis de Sales Church in Lakeview

Sunday, 11am Mass at Christ the King Church in Howard City

I trust that we will work together so that we can continue to grow as a parish and that individually we can draw closer to Christ. The transition and change can be difficult and I know that you are all resilient folks and will come together and help our parish move ahead. We plan for our current Mass schedule to conclude on the weekend of October 15-16 and the **new Mass schedule** to start the **weekend of October 22-23**. Please pray for those who are most affected by these changes.

I know that many of you have enjoyed the annual choir bonfire and that will take place on Saturday, October 15 after the 5pm Mass. So mark your calendar and be prepared for a night of fun and fellowship, as we continue our journey together.

I also want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Fr. Bill Zink for the help he has provided all of us as we worked towards our new Mass schedule. I hope that his desire to serve the people of God is contagious and is an example to all of us! I hope that when I am his age that I have the same stamina to help people worship and encounter the Lord.

For myself, I have felt and thought many things during this time and I am sure that you all have as well. May Christ always strengthen us and may Mary our mother protect us during this time. Please continue to pray for me and for all priests and especially for vocations to the priesthood.

May Christ be our Light,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. JVP" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Fr. James VanderLaan