



# SAINT THOMAS

## THE APOSTLE PARISH

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“Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:9-12).

Hello everyone. This is Fr. Marc Stockton, your temporary parochial administrator, writing with an important announcement. When Bishop Persico sent me to help you over a month ago, he gave me three major tasks. The first and most important was to ensure that the pastoral care and administration of the partnered parishes of St. Teresa and St. Thomas continued unabated until your new pastor arrived. With gratitude to the hard working staff and volunteers of both parishes, I believe we are accomplishing that task. The Bishop also sent me to address some financial concerns at both parishes. While much of that will need to wait until your new pastor arrives and some long term planning is done, I am pleased to report that, though not completely out of the woods, we are dealing successfully with the most immediately pressing financial issues, and both parishes are currently on solid ground thanks again to the work of our financial officers, Mary Harned and Dan Crawford, to our dutiful finance councils, and to your continued generosity.

The third task the Bishop asked me to do is why I am writing you today. One of the primary reasons for partnering parishes is to enable a single priest to carry out the pastoral care of multiple parishes. The pastoral care of parishes includes the celebration of Sunday Masses, which is why the Diocese of Erie has issued the following directive: “In addition, according to diocesan law concerning partnered parishes, there is to be only one Mass celebrated on the evening preceding Sundays and holy days of obligation. The time and place for that Mass is to be determined by the pastor, after having consulted the members of the shared Pastoral Council and the diocesan bishop” (*Implementation Guide for Partnered Parishes*, 11). If one priest is to be able to carry out the full pastoral care of both partnered parishes, then he must be able to celebrate all the weekend Masses himself. Two Saturday evening Masses makes that impossible. I have therefore been sent by the Bishop to reduce that to one Saturday evening Mass for both parishes.

After consulting both parish Pastoral Councils and the Bishop, I have decided the fairest way to accomplish this is to create a monthly, rotating schedule of Saturday evening Masses. One month, the Saturday evening Mass will be at one church, and,

the next month, the Saturday evening Mass will be at the other church. I know this decision will make no one happy, and believe me, I am not happy to have to do it. But the reality is that we are running out of priests to cover weekend Masses. Monsignor Swoger and Father Suppa have been more than generous with their time by helping to cover Masses in the past, despite the fact that they are retired and under no obligation to do so. Let us be honest, however, and acknowledge the fact that their service, as generous and faithful as it is, cannot continue indefinitely, and it is both unrealistic and, frankly, unfair, for us to expect it to.

Father Suppa will be unavailable to cover Masses for several weeks beginning November 16<sup>th</sup> due to a medical procedure, and we need to keep him in prayer for a speedy recovery. Given his extended absence, this is an opportune time for us to begin the new Saturday evening Mass arrangement. Therefore, Saturday, November 20, 2021, and Saturday, November 27, 2021, the Saturday evening Mass will be celebrated at St. Thomas church in Corry with no Saturday Mass celebrated at St. Teresa church in Union City. All Saturday evening Masses in December 2021 will be celebrated at St. Teresa church in Union City, with no Saturday evening Masses celebrated at St. Thomas church in Corry that month. In January 2022, all Saturday evening Masses will be celebrated at St. Thomas church in Corry again, with no Saturday evening Masses at St. Teresa church in Union City that month, and so forth.

Please note that this in no way affects Sunday morning Masses, the schedule of which remains the same. It also does not affect weekday Masses, the schedule of which will need to be determined by your new pastor when he arrives. I am sorry that this is one more sacrifice your parishes are being asked to make; you have certainly made your share. But I also trust that you can see the need for it. The vocation crisis is no longer coming for the Diocese of Erie; it is here. Please pray to the master of the harvest to send laborers for the harvest and to bless us with good priests, and please let me know if I can help you in any way until your new pastor arrives.

Peace in Christ,

*Fr. Marc Stockton*