



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EAST ST. JAMES PARISH

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**St. Michael The Archangel Parish**  
Location: 6490 Highway 44  
Convent, Louisiana 70723  
Residence Phone: (225) 562-3549

**St. Joseph Parish**  
Location: 2130 Rectory Street  
Paulina, Louisiana 70763

**Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish**  
Location: 616 Main Street  
Gramercy, Louisiana 70052  
Residence Phone: (225) 869-5324

August 26, 2020

Dear Parishioners of St. Michael, St. Joseph, and Most Sacred Heart,

As a tri-parish cluster we have been through a lot as of late. COVID-19 has affected and changed all our lives. More changes are about to take place. With September 1, 2020, our cluster will be served by a single priest. Fr. Alec Sheldon, who begins his four month spiritual/academic sabbatical in September, will no longer be our Associate Pastor, and he will not be replaced by another priest.

First, I want to express my most profound gratitude to Fr. Alec for his six-plus years of service in the cluster and for all the ways in which he has helped me as my associate. He has long desired and deserves the sabbatical he is undertaking. The timing of his sabbatical is only coincidental to the loss of a priest from our staff. Financial constraints, made all the more difficult by COVID-19, have made it untenable for the cluster to afford paying for two priests.

Income over the last several years has gradually declined. While in the past I have been able to adjust expenditures to fit the available financial resources, the monetary hit our cluster experienced because of COVID required a more dramatic restructuring. Since March, I began discerning what could be done to keep our parishes financially sound. The move from a two-priest cluster to a single priest was the only viable solution. The first week of May, I informed Bishop Duca of my calculations and my proposal, which he accepted "under advisement."

On Monday, August 17, 2020, Bishop Duca communicated his acceptance of the need for this major change and confirmed the decision to make the Cluster of St. Michael, St. Joseph, and Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, a single priest assignment. I will remain as pastor to help reshape the changes this personnel loss will require.

The most noticeable change required will be the cluster Mass Schedule. Canon Law prohibits a priest, excepting emergencies, from celebrating more than three (3) Masses on any given day, Sundays included. So we cannot continue a weekend schedule with two Vigils and four Sunday Masses. The most a single priest can do on a weekend would be five (5) Masses.

Please understand, finding and hiring a retired priest(s) to help every weekend to keep a six (6) Mass schedule would still be a financial burden on the cluster. I have seriously considered this option; it simply is not reasonable. [The only reason we were blessed with Fr. Ed Fuss, S.M. in his retirement was because the Marists Fathers paid the cluster to provide for Fr. Ed.]

Before going further, happily, the change in the Mass schedule will not begin until **October 1, 2020**. Fr. Alec, before he leaves for sabbatical, and Fr. Frank Uter, for the balance of September, will help with the existing schedule. This gives us a few weeks to adjust mentally and practically to this major change.

Even if some of you are unhappy with the new schedule, I simply have no choice but to shift down to a five Mass weekend schedule. My decision is made as objectively as possible, looking at the family population of each parish. St. Michael will be reduced to a single weekend Mass. Because Sunday is still our principal day of worship, if only one Mass is to be celebrated in a church, it should be on Sunday. Therefore, giving St. Michael a Sunday Mass influenced the timing of the revised Mass schedule.

**Therefore, the Weekend Mass Schedule beginning October 3-4, 2020, is:**

|           |          |            |                        |
|-----------|----------|------------|------------------------|
| Saturday: | 4:00 PM  | Vigil Mass | St. Joseph, Paulina    |
|           | 6:00 PM  | Vigil Mass | Sacred Heart, Gramercy |
| Sunday:   | 8:00 AM  | Mass       | St. Michael, Convent   |
|           | 10:00 AM | Mass       | St. Joseph, Paulina    |
|           | 5:00 PM  | Mass       | Sacred Heart, Gramercy |

Weekend confessions will continue as they are presently because of COVID protocols: Saturday, 10:00-11:00 AM and 2:00-3:00 PM; Sunday, 2:00-3:00 PM, all at Prompt Succor Chapel in Lutcher. Whenever we are allowed to return to using the regular church confessionals, the schedule will be: Saturday, 3:00-3:45 PM (before 4PM Mass) at St. Joseph; Sunday, 7:00-7:45 AM (before 8AM Mass) at St. Michael; Sunday, 4:00-4:45 PM (before 5PM Mass) at Sacred Heart.

Because of my work load, I am also changing the daily Mass schedule. Funerals in our cluster are a regular part of our schedule. There is generally a morning visitation in church. (COVID, of course, has currently stopped this.) The priest usually meets the family at 8:00am for a prayer of blessing. If daily Mass remains at 8:15am, this would no longer be possible. Therefore, I have decided to move the morning Mass to 7:00am. I am also moving the Wednesday afternoon Mass to 5:30pm because of my weekly obligations in Baton Rouge.

**Therefore, the Weekday Mass Schedule beginning October 1, 2020, is:**

|           |         |                              |   |
|-----------|---------|------------------------------|---|
| Monday    | 7:00 AM | Mass                         | Prompt Succor Chapel, Lutcher                                   |
| Tuesday   | 7:00 AM | Mass                         | Prompt Succor Chapel, Lutcher                                   |
| Wednesday | 8:00 AM | St. Peter Chanel School Mass |   |
|           |         |                              | St. Joseph, Paulina ( <i>currently not open to the public</i> ) |
| Wednesday | 5:30 PM | Mass                         | Prompt Succor Chapel, Lutcher                                   |
| Thursday  | 7:00 AM | Mass                         | Prompt Succor Chapel, Lutcher                                   |
| Friday    | 7:00 AM | Mass                         | Prompt Succor Chapel, Lutcher                                   |

I will no longer be able to offer a Wednesday early morning Mass at 5:45 AM. And I will no longer be able to schedule First Saturday Masses at 8:00 AM at St. Michael, because of the strong potential for Saturday funerals along with the two afternoon Vigil Masses.

Please pray for me as I continue to pray for all of you. These changes will not be easy for any of us, but together we will persevere in faith and in service to God. Our parishes will continue to grow stronger, and if Mass attendance increases and parishioner contributions increase, there might come a time when the cluster will be able to afford two priests again.

God bless,

*Fr. Vincent*