



14 January, 2009

Pastoral Letter Concerning Times of Masses Across Cairns

My Dear People,

I write at this time to advise of some changes to weekend Masses in the Cairns City area which will come into effect from the first Sunday of Lent (28Feb/1Mar).

Though the immediate reason for these changes is we now have fewer priests available to serve the sacramental and pastoral needs in this Diocese, there are other important guiding principles.

- I From the very beginning, in Apostolic times, the Christian community would meet together on the Lord's Day, to share Scripture, Prayer and *the Breaking of the Bread*. This weekly, at least, celebration of the Eucharist - the Mass - has characterised Catholic life at the family and parish level for now almost 2000 years. We, in this time and place, are privileged - gifted - to belong to this venerable and ongoing tradition of Faith.

- II The Christian *Sabbath*, the Lord's Day, Sunday, the first day, is the weekly reminder of the Resurrection, the Easter Event. At Easter, the high point of the liturgical year is the Vigil celebrated either the night before or preferably, but not very practically, in the wee dawn hours of Easter Morning – as the Sun rises. Some thirty years ago the Church, as a pastoral convenience, allowed the Sunday obligation to be covered by a vigil Mass on Saturday evenings. This also accords with the Prayer of the Church where Sundays and major Feasts are preceded by a Vigil Office on the previous evening.

Perhaps, though, the Saturday Vigil Mass may have become a substitute for and may have overshadowed the significance of the Sunday celebration of Mass (It has always seemed strange that some people who attend daily Mass or come frequently to Mass during the week, may attend the Saturday night Vigil, then Sunday - the Lord's Day - may be the only day of the week on which they do not participate in Eucharist and receive Communion!!)

Fortunately in this Diocese the Saturday Vigil Mass is not usually seen as the major parish Mass. It is more of a convenience Mass usually attended by fewer people.

So the priests of the Cairns area have agreed to some reduction in the number of Vigil Masses in this city region. Such a reduction in the Vigil Masses overcomes a major practical problem for us as priests with Masses in almost every parish on the Saturday evening within a tight time frame - generally at 6pm.

The only major change is a reduced number of Vigil Masses. While any change brings some practical inconveniences, this is overall a positive step - placing greater emphasis on Eucharist on Sunday - the Lord's Day.

- III Because Masses have been very readily available across the Cairns region, often at similar times in neighbouring parishes, a convenience mentality may have developed. This may have detracted from that sense of major Sunday parish celebration of Mass where a large number of the parishioners are regularly present together, creating a stronger sense of community. In our parishes most weekend Masses are not fully attended and so lose something of that sense of gathering the whole community. The two or three Masses celebrated in a parish then may seem all rather the same.

Given the humid climate in which we live, there are however other practicalities to consider: Not having churches too *packed* and crowded in this climate gives us all a degree of *breathing space*. The time of day at which Mass is celebrated, the design of the church building and its ventilation become practical considerations - until we can all afford to air-condition!!??

It is difficult to pray and to pay attention to Word and Sacrament when it is so hot and stuffy. Unfortunately where we live the weather can be at its most trying for the two major Christian celebration times – Christmas and Easter.

- IV The places where we gather for Mass are important – the building: the cathedral, parish churches, other churches, which have been long in use (such as Stratford and Freshwater) and other particular communities such as Bethlehem Home, Mater Dei Chapel, St Andrew's Redlynch Community and St Augustine's College Community.

As long as these Eucharistic communities are viable with sufficient people present every effort should be made to maintain and preserve at least a weekly celebration of Eucharist in each of these places. We are not into *closing down* any Mass centre where people gather regularly, though there will be some reduction where a number of Masses are celebrated in the same parish church.

Our re-arrangement of Mass times enables the priests to cover all the Mass centres across the Cairns City region in crisis situations: sickness, holidays or priests having to be away. A liturgy led by a deacon, ordained to preach the Word and distribute the Eucharist or a celebration of a lay-led Communion Service would be by way of exception.

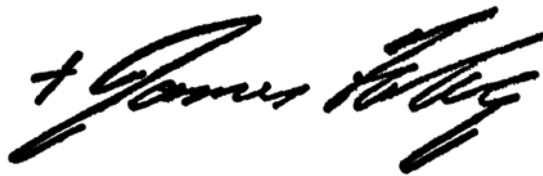
Following is a list of the Mass times across the Cairns region effective from the Weekend of the First Sunday of Lent 2009 (28 February /1 March). One of the priests' practical considerations was to group neighbouring parishes so that one priest can, if stretched, cover his own parish commitments and those of his neighbour's.

Another consideration has been to respect where possible the Mass times already in place and favoured by particular communities. When this has not been possible, every effort has been made to keep the new Mass time close to the old.

This schedule is only possible through the generosity of all the priests of the region who are willing to make every effort to cover all the commitments. A number of the parish priests have also generously offered to give up the Saturday Vigil Masses in their parish: West Cairns, Parramatta and Edmonton.

Thank you for your consideration and understanding. Re-arranging times and places for Mass never pleases everybody. However, we have tried to minimise disruptions and to maximise the opportunities for all established Christian communities to celebrate appropriately the Eucharist - Mass - on the Lord's Day.

Yours truly in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ James Foley', written in a cursive style.

+ James Foley
BISHOP OF CAIRNS

Dictated by Bishop James Foley. Typed and stamped in his absence.

Changes to Mass Times in Cairns City

	Saturday Vigil	Sunday	Changes
St Monica's Cathedral	7pm	6:30am, 10am, 5pm	No change
St Michael's Gordonvale	6pm	8am	No change
St Therese's Edmonton		9:30am & 5:30pm	<i>Vigil cancelled</i>
Our Lady Help of Christians, Earlville	6pm	8am	No change
St Joseph's Parramatta Park		8:30am	<i>Vigil cancelled</i>
St Francis Xavier's West Cairns		8am & 6pm	<i>Vigil cancelled</i>
Mother of Good Counsel, North Cairns	5:30pm		No change
Holy Cross Northern Beaches	6pm	8:30am	No change
St Andrew's Redlynch		5:30pm	No change
Sacred Heart, Freshwater		7am	Mass every week instead of alternately
St Augustine's Stratford		10:30am **	Mass every week instead of alternately ** <i>Change of time: 10:30am not 10:00am</i>
Bethlehem Home		9:25am	No change
Mater Dei Coral Sea Gardens		10:20am	No change
St Augustine's College (During school terms)		7:00pm	No change