



# THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI IN CINCINNATI

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June 16, 2019

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*Laudetur Jesus Christus!* It is with sadness that I announce that Fr. Lawrence Juarez will be leaving our parishes to spend a year away from the Oratory starting July 1. When he came to Cincinnati to join Fr. Al Lauer, he intended to join Fr. Al's Fathers and Brothers of Pentecost. As Fr. Al was dying, Fr. Lawrence promised Fr. Al that he would stay and keep Old St. Mary's open. Since 2002, Fr. Lawrence has faithfully done that. First of all, by not returning to his native Philippines and remaining on as Parochial Vicar. Secondly, by working and dealing with Fr. Adrian and myself as we all worked to establish the Oratory. In doing so, Fr. Lawrence has guaranteed the future of Old St. Mary's and now of Sacred Heart. For that, I thank him, and we all should.

Fr. Lawrence now feels that he has fulfilled and kept his promise to Fr. Al and that it is time to move on. He desires to live a life that is not inconsistent with the priesthood, but would not be consistent with the Oratorian rule and vocation, with the possibility of returning to his native Philippines. He also has made several other promises which he wishes to fulfill. To this end, Fr. Lawrence approached me in April to request time away. The Community approved a one-year period in which Fr. Lawrence could decide what he wished to do, which could include returning to the Oratory. The Holy See had to approve the indult, which it did on May 9. This petition came directly and only from Fr. Lawrence and the possibility to return remains open to him. The Oratory is founded on the ideas of stability, charity, and also liberty. A person is free to leave when they desire, and Fr. Lawrence is exercising this possibility.

Unfortunately, with Fr. Lawrence's departure, we will be unable to keep up with everything currently on the parishes' schedules. I have tried my best to keep the parishes as separate as I humanly could, especially regarding the liturgical life. This will be the first time in Old St. Mary's history when she will not have her own full-time priest, a reality Sacred Heart faced when Fr. Vincent left a few years back. Fr. Adrian remains primarily assigned to Christ Hospital and the Hamilton County Jail and as Sunday help to the parishes. I will otherwise be the only priest split between both parishes. We luckily have several priests who remain willing to assist, but even with this, several things will need to change and be coordinated between the parishes.

This has become an unfortunate reality as Catholics make coming to Mass less and less of a priority, as our parishes become emptier and emptier, and fewer men are entering the priesthood. A parish not far from us recently went from 6 Sunday Masses to 3 Sunday Masses. The Deanery is actively trying to study how many Masses are needed in the Downtown area based on the capacity of our parishes. However, I have to keep in mind the parishes, our eclectic and special nature, the health of the Oratory, and the mission of the Oratory. Something more radical would have been easier, but I believe what is being proposed is fair. Please note that even with the new schedule, most priests still believe that I am crazy and too generous.

To this end, the Archdiocese has given its consent to the following plan, effective July 1. Sacred Heart's Sunday schedule is not affected. At Old St. Mary's, the 7:00 p.m. Mass is being eliminated. The rest of the schedule is being modified to a 7:30 a.m. (Low Traditional Mass), 9:30 a.m. (Sung Ordinary Form Latin Mass), 11:30 a.m. (German Mass), and 1:00 p.m. (Low English Mass). The confession schedule will be outlined in the coming weeks. This is in due to Fr. Lawrence's departure. However, spreading Masses out a bit more will also help to deal with our growing parking issue as well as ensuring the celebrants can get from one Mass to the next. This new schedule will also allow for a better schedule for some of our visiting priests so as to ensure we can keep them on the schedule based on their own busy schedules and other parish commitments. Fr. Adrian has also eliminated Sunday Mass at Christ Hospital due to these circumstances.

Further, Daily Mass at Sacred Heart is being eliminated, Monday through Wednesday. Weekday Mass will be continued on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. Daily Mass at Old St. Mary's is not affected, but confession will be heard before Mass at 11:15 a.m. and not after. To standardize the weekday schedule, Saturday daily Mass is being moved from 6:45 a.m. to 7:15 a.m. Adoration at Old St. Mary's on Tuesday's and First Friday's will remain as is, but Wednesday Adoration is canceled. Adoration at Sacred Heart will remain on Saturday, with the Miraculous Medal novena before Benediction. The Daily Mass schedule will be reevaluated in the coming months. Lastly, the Holy Day Schedule will be announced as Holy Days come up. However, there will be no evening Masses held at Sacred Heart. There will be only one evening Holy Day and special Masses, primarily at Old St. Mary's, and these will be in the Traditional Rites.

I realize that some of these decisions may be disappointing. However, these decisions came about after much prayer and consultation, considering a life with fewer priests. Most consider these, as I have said, not to be radical enough. I believe that, for now, we can make this work. I wish to stress, however, that we continue to rely upon two outside priests assisting us each Sunday and upon Fr. Valentine for his generous daily assistance. So I ask that you continue to pray not just for us, but also for the priests who assist us. Without them, I would have been forced to make more significant changes to our schedule. If any of them are not able to continue, there will be further changes. So please treat them well and keep them healthy!

There will also be changes in the parish office. I will be hiring one full time trained administrative assistant to work with Jim between both parishes. As I will be giving up more administrative and clerical tasks. To avoid letting anyone go, if they chose not to apply for the new position, both current secretaries have been offered modified roles as receptionists, for as long as this can be handled by the budget (which will be determined yearly by our Finance Councils) and if they accept the new positions. Regarding the new position, I am accepting resumes through June 24. Interviews will be held next week and the week after, with a start date of July 8. A job description is on the parish webpage. Please submit resumes to [jpbevak@cincinnatiatoratory.com](mailto:jpbevak@cincinnatiatoratory.com).

Finally, I wish to stress that unlike other parishes that have made changes, this is only a temporary setback for us. In two years, we will have two new priests who will be eager to serve and offer the Sacraments. This is what Oratory has helped to ensure for the parishes, that they can remain open and vibrant. Please note that these were not easy decisions or something I was looking forward to announcing. There are simply not enough priests at the moment to go around and we do not have the attendance to justify the schedule that we have. Also, anything said contrary to what is said in Fr. Lawrence's or this letter is not true. At best, such rumors are a misunderstanding; at worst, they are sinful gossip and slander. I remind everyone of the charity they are supposed to have. I see this as an excellent opportunity for us to grow in virtue, and also to be willing to sacrifice across the board for our parishes and even for the faith. We need to be more missionary to help fill our pews and to produce more holy priests. There is a shared sacrifice across the board. We are willing to sacrifice to keep our traditions by maintaining more Masses than some parishes triple our size. I am asking you to sacrifice your convenience a bit so that we can have stronger parishes.

I thank everyone for their understanding. Please note that this will go into effect July 1, with the new Sunday schedule effective July 7. A farewell reception will be held for Fr. Lawrence following the 9:15 a.m. Mass on June 30. Please remember us in your prayers, please continue to support our Oratorian seminarians (who will be your future priests), and please be assured of our prayers for you.

In Christ,



Fr. Jon-Paul Bevak, C.O.  
*Provost & Pastor*