



Dear Parishioners,

It has been a true blessing to serve as your pastor for nearly two years. From the very beginning, one concern has guided my prayer and reflection: how best to serve the spiritual needs of every family across our four worship sites—Holy Trinity in West Portsmouth, St. Peter in Chains in Wheelersburg, Holy Redeemer, and St. Mary in Portsmouth.

Since my arrival, the question of how to balance our weekend Mass schedule and Religious Education Program (PSR) with the realities of family life, parish resources, and the needs of our clergy has been a constant prayer of mine. I have sought ways to ensure that every parishioner has access to the sacraments, faith formation, and a community of prayer that nurtures spiritual growth. The current Mass times and schedules have been on my heart and in my prayers almost daily, as I have considered how to best serve our parish family.

Over the years, PSR has had a rich history at each of our churches. Families have gathered faithfully to form their children in the faith, building a strong foundation for generations. This year, I chose to move PSR to the Holy Redeemer campus to make it accessible to the entire parish. One concern was that offering PSR downtown could unintentionally pull families away from St. Peter Sunday Mass, creating a need to attend Mass at another site. To avoid this, we initially offered PSR on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. While this increased registration and attendance compared to previous years, many families were still unable to attend due to sports, family obligations, and other commitments.

Through prayerful discernment, it became clear that a Sunday PSR option is the most effective way to ensure every child in our parish—especially those not enrolled in programs such as The Notre Dame Schools—has the opportunity to grow in faith and participate fully in parish life. At the same time, I am mindful of the challenge of providing reliable pastoral coverage for all weekend Masses. It is essential that we care for our clergy while ensuring that every Mass is celebrated with reverence, consistency, and joy.

As your pastor, I am called to look beyond individual buildings and communities and discern what is best for the parish as a whole. These decisions are never made lightly—they are guided by prayer, love for each parishioner, and a sincere hope that every person will feel welcomed, nourished, and spiritually supported. Each change reflects a careful balance of honoring the past while preparing for the future. I ask that we approach these decisions with hearts open to the movement of the Holy Spirit, trusting that God is guiding us together into a deeper life of faith.

Through careful and prayerful reflection, we have arrived at a path forward that will take effect beginning the first weekend of 2026—January 3rd and 4th. I share this with you now so that families, volunteers, and ministers can thoughtfully prepare for this meaningful transition for the good of our entire parish family.

New Mass Schedule

Saturday:

- 4:00 p.m. – Holy Trinity, West Portsmouth (Confessions 3:00 p.m.)
- 6:00 p.m. – St. Peter in Chains, Wheelersburg (Confessions 5:00 p.m.)

Sunday:

- 8:00 a.m. – Holy Redeemer, Portsmouth (Confessions 7:00 a.m.)
- 11:30 a.m. – St. Mary, Portsmouth (Confessions 10:30 a.m.)
- 5:00 p.m. – Spanish Mass at Holy Redeemer, Portsmouth (Confessions 4:00 p.m.)

This schedule allows one priest to cover all weekend Masses if necessary while providing a Sunday PSR option for families.

PSR will now take place on Sundays between the 8:00 a.m. Mass at Holy Redeemer and the 11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Mary. This timing provides families with a consistent, parish-wide formation opportunity, removes weekday conflicts, and allows children to fully participate in parish life while continuing to attend Mass at their home church.

How Each Church Site—and Our Entire Parish—Benefits

Every church in our parish holds a special place in our hearts, and every parishioner is precious in the eyes of God. The goal of this proposal is to strengthen each community while fostering unity across the parish, ensuring that every family has access to worship, formation, and the sacraments.

Holy Trinity – West Portsmouth

Holy Trinity remains a steady spiritual anchor with its 4:00 p.m. Saturday vigil Mass. This beloved tradition continues unchanged and assures dependable sacramental coverage even in emergencies. Families can remain rooted in the familiar rhythm that has nurtured their faith for generations. Keeping Mass at 4:00 p.m. also allows the congregation, which is mostly rural, to safely drive to and from Church, especially in the winter months.

St. Peter in Chains – Wheelersburg

St. Peter remains a cornerstone of faith in Wheelersburg with its Saturday 6:00 p.m. vigil Mass. While the Sunday morning Mass moves to Holy Redeemer, St. Peter continues to provide a meaningful opportunity for families to celebrate the Eucharist. This schedule also allows families to participate in Sunday PSR at Holy Redeemer, fostering new connections across our parish while keeping St. Peter central to the spiritual life of the community. I understand that this change may be difficult for some, but I assure you that St. Peter remains a vital, cherished part of our parish. Your continued love and dedication will help ensure it flourishes for years to come.

Holy Redeemer – Portsmouth

With the Sunday 8:00 a.m. Mass and PSR, Holy Redeemer becomes a true gathering place for families from all four worship sites. The larger worship space that Holy Redeemer offers will benefit all our families, providing room for growth, fellowship, and a vibrant parish experience. This unity fosters community, shared formation, and a deeper sense that we belong to one another in Christ. Holy Redeemer continues its central role in the spiritual life of Portsmouth and our parish.

St. Mary – Portsmouth

St. Mary's Sunday 11:30 a.m. Mass ensures accessible worship while allowing for smoother transitions between weekend Masses. This schedule strengthens the community's spiritual life while maintaining St. Mary as a warm, welcoming place for families to celebrate the Eucharist. St. Mary continues to serve as a hub of parish life, helping sustain the unity and vitality of our parish family.

How the Parish as a Whole Is Strengthened

This new schedule and Sunday PSR program strengthen the entire parish by:

- Ensuring every child has access to faith formation without weekday conflicts.
- Allowing one priest to cover all weekend Masses if necessary, supporting clergy and sacramental stability.
- Preserving meaningful Masses at all four church sites, honoring each community's unique role.
- Encouraging parish unity through shared formation and worship experiences.
- Supporting long-term stability and growth for generations to come.

Over the past few years, we have seen remarkable growth in our parish's life of faith, including a record number of adults in OCIA (Order of Christian Initiation of Adults) and increased participation in both our parish schools and PSR programs. These blessings remind us that our mission is fruitful, and we must continue to grow together as St. John Paul II Scioto Catholic Parish, moving beyond a focus on individual church sites and embracing our new identity as a single, unified parish.

Each community contributes uniquely to the parish, and every parishioner benefits from a schedule that balances tradition, access, and sustainability. Together, we continue to grow as a united, vibrant, and spiritually nourished parish family.

The current Mass times we are moving away from have been a constant prayer and concern of mine since my arrival nearly two years ago. Every decision is guided by a desire to care for every member of our parish family, strengthen our communities, and provide the best possible opportunities for worship, formation, and fellowship. I invite you to approach these changes with hearts open to the Holy Spirit. Let us remain docile to God's guidance, trusting that He is leading our parish into a future full of hope, growth, and deeper faith. Together, may we embrace this moment as an opportunity to draw closer to one another and to Christ, allowing His Spirit to shape us into a stronger, more unified parish family.

With every blessing,

Fr. Stephen Smith