

**An Assessment by the Council of Priests
of the Diocese of Cloyne on our
celebration of Sunday Mass**

8th June 2018

Sunday Mass in a Time of Fewer Priests

The Eucharist is the “font and apex of the Christian life”; among the many activities of a parish, “none is as vital or community-forming as the Sunday celebration of the Lord’s Day.”¹ The Second Vatican Council identified four ways that the risen Jesus is present to us at Mass: in the assembly that gathers in His name; in the priest or bishop who presides; in the proclamation of the Word, and “especially under the Eucharistic species.”² All four ways are needed for an authentic celebration of the Eucharist. In this letter we wish to address one of these four ways that Christ is present, namely, through the ministry of the priest.

As a Diocese we are facing the reality of a reduced and an aging presbyterate. There are now 29 parishes with a single priest and even urban centres have fewer priests than heretofore. Were it not for the generous service of our retired priests the shortage would be much more obvious. Each reduction in personnel means that more is being asked of the remaining parish priest or priests. If we are to honestly and prudently face up to the situation, then difficult choices must be faced, including the reduction of Masses.

Clergy meetings over the past year have discussed several responses to the reality of fewer priests in the Diocese of Cloyne, including the renewed promotion of vocations and the sharing of responsibilities between the priests of adjoining parishes (“Pastoral Areas”).

The evolving situation presents as many opportunities as it does challenges. Having fewer but better prepared Masses, that bring together a greater number of the local faith community, can make for a more authentic celebration of the Day of the Lord.

The following practices have been agreed and are now Diocesan policy:

¹ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 11. St. John Paul, *Dies Domini*, 35.

² Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7.

1. Each priest should normally celebrate two Sunday Masses and no more than three Sunday Masses, including the Vigil Mass.³
2. Each parochial church should have at least one Sunday or Vigil Mass. (An exception can be made in parishes where one priest serves four parish churches.)
3. There should normally be no more than one Vigil Mass in each parish.
4. Priests should allow for at least 90 minutes between Mass-times on Sunday.

It is also noted that:

5. There is seldom the need to replicate the number of Sunday Masses on a Holyday of Obligation.
6. Additional Masses (for funerals, weddings, etc.) should not be scheduled on a Sunday.
7. A temporary reduction in Sunday Masses may be introduced to provide for the priest's annual leave or where a priest is absent due to illness.
8. The parish is the basic unit of our Diocese and its own churches are the ordinary places of worship for the faithful. In the event of a Sunday Mass being cancelled, we appeal to parishioners to choose one of the alternative Masses within their home parish.

In the era of the Penal Laws, when there were far fewer priests than now and few places of worship, our forefathers retained a deep devotion to the Mass. The Eucharist sustained and strengthened the strong tradition of faith that we have inherited.

May our times, which also challenge the Christian faith, mark a renewal in the quality of our Eucharistic celebration. Nourished at the Table of the Lord and by his Word, may we grow in communion with the Lord and one another.

Yours faithfully, in Christ,

Most Rev. William Crean
Bishop of Cloyne

Rev. Fr. Tom McDermott
for the Council of Priests

³ *Code of Canon Law*, 905 §1 Apart from those cases in which the law allows him to celebrate or concelebrate the Eucharist a number of times on the same day, a priest may not celebrate more than once a day. §2 If there is a scarcity of priests, the local ordinary may for a good reason allow priests to celebrate twice in one day or even, if pastoral need requires it, three times on Sundays or holydays of obligation.