

# Cumberland-area parishes consolidate Masses

With a shortage of priests and a declining population base, five Cumberland-area parishes have reduced their Mass schedules and are making plans to work more collaboratively.

Weekend Masses were reduced from 12 to 9, and daily Masses were reduced from 15 to 14 each week. The changes were to have gone into effect Sept. 1, but were implemented July 1 after Father John Lesnick and Father Ty Hullinger were reassigned to other parts of the archdiocese.

There are currently no archdiocesan priests serving in the region. The Capuchin Franciscans who staff Ss. Peter and Paul in Cumberland and St. Ambrose in Cresaptown have been temporarily celebrating Masses for all the faith communities, which also include St. Patrick in Cumberland, St. Mary in Cumberland and St. Patrick in Mount Savage.

“What we are trying to avoid, not only in Cumberland, but in other areas, is to have a double scheduling of Masses,” said Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski, whose Seton Vicariate encompasses Western Maryland. “There has been a lot of preparation and planning, so this is not something that came out of the blue.”

Bishop Rozanski noted that a regional planning team in Cumberland has been meeting to address ways of dealing with fewer priests available for ministry. Similar planning efforts are underway in other parts of the archdiocese, including northern Anne Arundel County and South Anne Arundel County.

In the fall, the archdiocese will name an archdiocesan priest to serve as pastor of St. Patrick in Cumberland, St. Mary in Cumberland and St. Patrick in Mount Savage, Bishop Rozanski said. The Capuchins will remain at Ss. Peter and Paul and St. Ambrose, and the archdiocese is in dialogue with them on ways they might be able to help meet other pastoral needs in the region, Bishop Rozanski said.

Capuchin Father James Kurtz, pastor of Ss. Peter and Paul and St. Ambrose, said

parishioners have been accepting of the changes.

“They seem to be dealing pretty well with it,” said Father Kurtz, noting that the Masses for Ss. Peter and Paul are temporarily being held at St. Patrick, Cumberland, while his church undergoes an interior restoration.

“I haven’t heard any grumbling,” he said.

Deacon Fred Passauer, temporary administrator of St. Patrick, Cumberland, St. Patrick Mount Savage and St. Mary, Cumberland, said parishioners recognize that there is a greater need for lay involvement in supporting various ministries. They also recognize the need for more religious vocations, he said.

“We’re looking at doing something with eucharistic adoration with a focus on vocations,” Deacon Passauer said.

Deacon Passauer, who also ministers as pastoral associate at six parishes in far-Western Maryland, said parishioners have been supportive of him and the priests.

“If not for the generous response of staff and parishioners, it would have been a very belabored effort,” he said.

Some area parishes already share resources and further sharing will be discussed in the coming months, according to Deacon Passauer.

The five Cumberland-area parishes serve approximately 2,000 families. About 72,000 people live in Allegany County.