



THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT PAUL

June 3, 2021

Saint Charles Lwanga & Companions

Dear Cathedral of St. Paul Parishioners and Friends:

You have possibly heard the news of this summer's priest assignments by now. Among them are that Father Josh Altonji, who has served as Chaplain of St. Stephen's, Chaplain of John Carroll High School, and Parochial Vicar at the Cathedral for the past three years is moving to Holy Spirit in Huntsville, where he will serve as Parochial Vicar and work especially with the Hispanic community. Holy Spirit was my first assignment as a priest and it is a wonderful parish; I know that Fr. Altonji will have a great experience there. We thank him for his faithful, generous, and ever-cheerful service here in Birmingham and send him to Huntsville with our prayers.

A farewell Mass will be held for Fr. Altonji on Thursday, June 24, Solemnity of St. John the Baptist (and the fourth anniversary of his ordination) at St. Stephen's at 5:30pm; it will be followed by a reception and traditional midsummer bonfire on the lawn. If you are unable to come to this Mass/reception but would like to give a gift or spiritual bouquet to Fr. Altonji, please feel free to bring these by the office to Krista, and she will ensure he receives them.

Fr. Altonji's departure comes at a time when the diocese is short five priests with respect to the number of assignments that need to be filled; by now we were to have at least four more priests from India and one from Spain, but due to Covid-related immigration delays, those priests still have not arrived, nor does it appear they will arrive soon. Consequently, Bishop Raica does not have a priest to send to St. Stephen's or the Cathedral to replace Fr. Altonji. Moreover, there are other priest retirements coming, as well as other immigrant priests whose visas will expire and will have to return home. We are starting to face very acutely the challenges of the priest shortage.

Because Fr. Altonji will not be replaced in the foreseeable future, the duties of campus ministry for university students in Birmingham are being transferred to me and the Cathedral. Father Justin Ward, who will live in residence at the Cathedral, will provide Sunday Mass temporarily at St. Stephen's Chapel, but he will not be able to maintain that for long. We will invite the students and the other members of the St. Stephen's community to join us at the Cathedral on Sundays, and will look for ways to help strengthen the sense of community going forward (for example, through coffee/donuts or potlucks after one of the Masses, as well as other activities).

Beyond the changes that affect Sundays, it does appear that we will be able to use the St. Stephen's facility for a while longer for weekday activities – although ultimately we will face the challenge of paying for its upkeep without having its prior revenue stream to offset those expenses. I would anticipate that, at least for the Fall semester, we will be able to continue having a weekly student Mass (e.g., on Thursday evenings) and other activities there. I am working with the Campus Minister and student leaders to work out a campus ministry plan and will share it soon.

However, we also now must recognize that some aspects of our Cathedral weekly schedule will no longer be manageable with our reduced clergy staffing going forward. According to canon law, priests are not ordinarily supposed to celebrate more than one Mass per day; we may, however, celebrate up to two Masses Monday-Saturday and up to three Masses on a Sunday or a Holy Day of Obligation when needed. When other commitments and local needs are factored in, however, such as occasional funerals, weddings, confessions and Masses at St. Rose Academy and other schools, etc., it becomes clear that our current Cathedral schedule must be reconsidered.

Therefore, having consulted with Bishop Raica, Cathedral staff, and the parish council, I have decided that, starting Monday, July 5, 2021, we will no longer have the 6:30am Mass Monday-Friday or the 8:30am Mass on Saturdays. The new weekly liturgical schedule will be:

Monday-Friday	11:30am-12:00pm Confessions, 12:10pm Daily Mass
Saturday	3:00-4:30pm Confessions, 5:00pm Anticipated Mass for Sunday
Sunday	7:15am, 8:30am, and 11:00am Sunday Masses
Holy Days	<i>Schedule published in the bulletin, web site, on social media, etc.</i>

We had already been spending a great deal of money each year to bring in supply priests to meet the schedule demands that could not be reasonably met by our resident clergy. To maintain a similar schedule going forward would require even more outside help at considerable expense, which I judge not to be a good use of the financial resources you have so generously provided. My decision was also influenced by questions of demand: whereas the 6:30am Mass, pre-Covid, often had 30-50 people in attendance, lately it has only had around 20, as many downtown workers have continued working from home. But the demand for confessions at 11:30am and crowd size at the 12:10pm Mass on weekdays, on the other hand, have continued to grow and remain quite strong.

In all of this, our commitment remains firm to campus ministry, and we plan to build upon the successes and good practices that Fr. Altonji and his predecessors cemented in it. In fact, campus ministry is a key part of the solution to our late problems: many young men begin to perceive a priestly vocation through the campus ministry experiences they have in college. We also continue to promote vocations through our altar serving program, which has also recently grown and has become a wonderful fraternity of boys and young men who are open to wherever the Lord may lead them. Although we may yet have to suffer through the effects caused by a shortage of priests, I do see much hope on the horizon! “Pray, therefore, the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest” (Mt 9:38).

A committee to help advise on the future of St. Stephen’s Chapel and our campus ministry is also being established by Bishop Raica; I will keep you apprised of any further decisions that are made. I am grateful for your understanding and support, and I welcome any feedback or questions you may have. While I certainly regret these changes and the inconvenience they may cause to some, I also trust that you will understand the new challenges that we are rather suddenly facing and will continue to pray for all our priests and our bishop. Thank you!

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Very Reverend Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Pastor & Rector