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well. One of the risks of trimming back the number of churches and Mass times was that we would trim too much.

After two months of the current plan effected in July, it became clear that it was not achieving the viability we had sought. Many of our parishioners had determined to go elsewhere, each having their own reasons, and most every Sunday morning at Saint Mary's at our 9 AM, the Mass with the highest attendance and our only Mass in English on Sunday morning, our church and parking lot were full to overflowing. In short, we no longer had enough space and opportunities to serve the people of our parishes well. So, on the matter of reversal, we trimmed too much rather than too little, and now we are attempting to correct that. This is not unusual when attempting to right-size a home, a business, a lifestyle, etc. So, although it was not intended, it is not unusual.

Concerning the celebration of more than 3 Masses on a weekend (namely, Saturday anticipatory and Sunday day Masses), please allow me to provide some context as I understand it. Canon 905 reads as follows:

Can. 905 §1. A priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except in cases where the law permits him to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day. §2. If there is a shortage of priests, the local ordinary can allow priests to celebrate twice a day for a just cause, or if pastoral necessity requires it, even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

We see in this canon the ordinary number of Masses a priest is permitted to celebrate. Such a discipline no doubt intends to better unify the people of God in

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one celebration and to live within the mortal limits of a priest's own physical stamina. That said, one canon of note is:

Canon 87 §1. Whenever he judges that it contributes to their spiritual welfare, the diocesan Bishop can dispense the faithful from disciplinary laws, both universal laws and those particular laws made by the supreme ecclesiastical authority for his territory or his subjects ...

What this canon means is that there are some disciplines and practices, such as this, which the Bishop can dispense from in case of real necessity. And worth noting is that every norm exists for a reason. I have held an expression for years: When the exception becomes the norm, the norm becomes obsolete. An ambulance or police car driving faster than the speed limit is a permitted exception, but they are not always speeding. If they were, then that would be the norm. And so, this exception has been determined necessary for our communities because these are exceptional circumstances, and it was permitted in the following context:

1. Our parishes is blessed to have 3 deacons who can assist me with preaching on occasion.
2. We are blessed to have many able-bodied retired priests who have made it known they are available to assist on an occasional basis.

This is not the deacons having their own Mass or liturgy but only assisting me in the role of preaching on occasion. And this is not retired priests assisting in a regularly scheduled way, but only on occasion (e.g. – illness, vacation, etc.). And it is in this context that we go forth with the plan proposed here.

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Please know that as your pastor and as a fellow Catholic, my heart goes out to you during this time of change, and my prayers are for you. These decisions are carefully considered and not lightly made.

There has been a lot of talk concerning canon law throughout this process. Maybe too much at times. Yet the canon which probably should have been presented first and most often is the final one. Namely:

Can. 1752 ... and the salvation of souls, which must always be the supreme law in the Church, is to be kept before one's eyes.

In the end, we should ultimately be trying to help each other get to Heaven through a closer walk with Jesus and one another in the living of our Catholic Faith in the one, holy Catholic and apostolic Church. I can only ask that we continue to strive to be mutually sympathetic and supportive to one another as we respond to the changing realities of Catholic life here in central Minnesota.

Thank you for your patience and for your prayers. Remember that I continue to be available by phone, email, in person to respond to your questions and concerns to the best of my ability.

Our Lady of Good Counsel, pray for us.

In Christ,

Father Mitchell Bechtold

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FATHER MITCHELL'S PASTORAL BULLETIN

Sunday, September 13, 2026

**To the parishioners of the Church of Saint Mary,
serving the communities of Melrose, Meire Grove, Greenwald & Spring Hill
on the church campuses in Melrose & Meire Grove**

The Holy Father's prayer intention for September: "Let us pray for a just and sustainable management of water, a vital resource, so that everyone may have equal access to it."

Greetings.

In this weekend's parish bulletin you will read the news about our changing Mass times. Beginning the weekend of September 19 and 20, and going forward for an indeterminate amount of time, I will now ordinarily be celebrating 4 weekend Masses. The times and locations are these: at Saint Mary's in Melrose, Saturdays at 5 PM, and Sundays at 9:30 AM and noon (Spanish); and at Saint John's in Meire Grove, Sundays at 7:30 AM.

This change can seem like both a reversal from our previous plan ... and it kind of is. It can also seem like the break from the ordinary discipline so often presented to the people of our diocese, that a priest is not to celebrate more than 3 Masses on a weekend ... and it kind of is, too. But I hope you will hear me as I present the context and the justification on these two points.

On the matter of a reversal. Part of the goal of this All Things New (ATN) restructuring here in our diocese is about right-sizing: to have the right amount of spaces and places, and the right amount of opportunities to celebrate Mass and gather as a community, so to serve the whole people of God in our Diocese