



January 09, 2025

My Dear Brothers and Sister in Christ in Whatcom County,

The emergency of Fr. Thumbi's cancer diagnosis has forced me to make immediate changes to the daily Mass, office hours, and exposition schedule for our Family. I am writing to provide context, decisions, and a look ahead.

Partners in the Gospel - Writing on the Wall

As our society rapidly secularizes, our Church faces dwindling numbers of parishioners, priests, and financial resources. At its core, the purpose of Partners in the Gospel was to help us better weather these reductions through administrative consolidation, with the theory that a small community might be wiped out by the loss of a priest or a reduced Sunday collection, but a larger community should still have the resources necessary to reorganize and rebuild. I fully believe Partners in the Gospel was and is necessary and I remain deeply grateful to Archbishop Etienne for having the courage to undertake it.

Unfortunately, it has become clear that we were *already* in crisis before we were able to take action. While the hope of Partners was that we would have three years to plan and discuss our future together, the reality has been the same steady drum-beat of crises in priestly assignments that preceded Partners – crises that we *have* been able to weather better, but crises all the same. In light of this, many parish Families have approached their Partners planning driven by the question “How might we do this with one fewer priest?” It is a question I have always had in the back of my mind for Whatcom County, but one I was hoping we would not have to answer so soon.

Fr. Thumbi – Catalyst, Not Cause

Due to his recent cancer diagnosis, the extreme pain it has been causing him, and his need to focus on his treatment, Fr. Thumbi has requested to clear his schedule of all responsibilities except weekend Masses. This is an *indefinite* request, and we are not sure how long this will be his reality. With some significant and unexpected deaths of Archdiocesan priests recently, it is also clear that there is no one who can take Fr. Thumbi's place here in Whatcom County. Clearing his schedule requires immediate changes.

However, I want to strongly emphasize that these changes were coming to us eventually. They may be upon us faster than we had hoped, with far less planning and conversation than I had hoped, but we cannot think of these as temporary changes to get us through a crisis. The *status quo* is not viable. We need to prepare our county for the potential of fewer priests, and to make our assignment more doable for the priests we still have.



Daily Mass Schedule

Previous Schedule	Week of January 13	Week of Jan. 20, & Forward
Monday 9:00 am – Deming 9:00 am – Sacred Heart	Monday 9:00 am – Deming 9:00 am – Sacred Heart	Monday 8:15 am – Sacred Heart 9:00 am – Deming
Tuesday 5:30 pm – Assumption 6:00 pm – Ferndale	Tuesday 5:30 pm – Assumption	Tuesday 5:30 pm – Assumption
Wednesday 7:15 am - Assumption 9:00 am – Blaine 5:00 pm – Viking Catholic 6:00 pm – Lynden (Spanish)	Wednesday 7:15 am – Assumption 5:00 pm – Viking Catholic 6:00 pm – Lynden (Spanish)	Wednesday 8:15 am – Sacred Heart 5:00 pm – Viking Catholic 6:00 pm – Lynden (Spanish)
Thursday 7:15 am – Assumption 9:00 am – Sacred Heart 9:00 am – Lynden 6:00 pm – Lummi	Thursday 7:15 am – Assumption 9:00 am – Blaine 6:00 pm – Lummi	Thursday 8:15 am – Assumption 9:00 am – Blaine 6:00 pm – Lummi
Friday 8:15 am – Assumption (School) 9:00 am – Ferndale 9:00 am – Lynden 9:00 am – Sacred Heart	Friday 8:15 am – Assumption (School) 9:00 am – Ferndale 9:00 am – Lynden	Friday 8:15 am – Assumption (School) 9:00 am – Ferndale 9:00 am – Lynden

Bellingham Exposition

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in Bellingham will be only at Assumption, running from **9:00 am on Thursday** until **8:00 am on Friday**.

This will begin on January 23. January 15 (Assumption) and 17 (Sacred Heart) remain the same.

Office Schedule

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Fr. Moore				
Day Off	Sacred Heart	Lynden	Ferndale	Assumption
Fr. Stephan				
Assumption	Day Off	Sacred Heart	Ferndale	Lynden

Explanation of Mass Changes

1. **Minimize Change** – because this is an *emergency* change, I have tried to keep already existing Mass times and locations as much as possible. Our final schedule will only be developed after much broader consultation.

2. **Bellingham Focus + Reduction** – Almost half of Whatcom County lives in the city of Bellingham, so it is important that we try to have Mass in Bellingham every day. However, Bellingham does not need *two* daily Masses
 - a. As such, I have cancelled the Wednesday, 7:15 am at Assumption, the Thursday, 9:00 am at Sacred Heart, and moved the Friday, 9:00 am at Sacred Heart to Wednesday.

3. **Change to 8:15 am** – With only one daily Mass in Bellingham, I changed the morning Mass times to 8:15 am as a compromise between the Assumption and Sacred Heart Mass times. This has the added benefit of creating consistency across the city and providing another opportunity for school parents to attend Mass after dropping off their students.

4. **One Mass Each** – Canon 905 says that a priest should not celebrate more than one Mass each day without a good reason, so I have scheduled each priest for only one daily Mass.
 - a. Required removing one Mass from Tuesday (Ferndale) and Wednesday (Blaine).

5. **One Mass per Location** – Outside of Bellingham, I have tried to ensure that each church has one daily Mass each week.
 - a. Required cancelling the Thursday, 9:00 am in Lynden so that Blaine could have a Mass.

3 Competing Interests & 2 Rejected Options

There were three competing interests that I found it difficult to balance:

1. **Maintain the School Mass time** – The school is a very complicated system, with schedules built a full year ahead of time. Moving the school Mass creates a *lot* of falling dominos.
2. **Maintain the Exposition Schedules** – Similarly, getting people to sign up for exposition hours has been more and more challenging at both Assumption and Sacred Heart, so moving exposition will likely result in losing adorers.
3. **Balance Mass Cancellations** – Ideally, every parish in our Family would be affected by these cancellations equally.

This resulted in two rejected options:

1. **Monday Mass at Sacred Heart, Tue. – Fri. at Assumption** – This would have allowed us to keep the school Mass time and the Assumption exposition times, but would have unequally affected Sacred Heart with two Mass cancellations and a change to its exposition times.
2. **Move the School Mass to Thursday, keeping Sacred Heart Masses on Mon. and Fri.** – This would have allowed us to keep all current exposition times and equally distribute the cancellations. It was ruled about because changing the school Mass was too burdensome.

In the end, the present schedule was chosen because, of all the possible disturbances, the changes required of adorers were seen as *minimal* (Assumption adorers are able to keep their same hours but shift them to a different day) and potentially *beneficial* (combining adorers from both Bellingham churches makes exposition in the city a stronger and more reliable program).

Moving Forward

Community Feedback

Even if we were eventually going to have to make these changes, I still would have preferred to have broader conversations about these changes before making them. To that end, please regard these as **experimental changes**. I will work with my staff to schedule listening sessions (likely during Lent) so that we can discuss how things have gone with these changes, and what our hopes are for a permanent schedule.

Sunday Mass Changes

Unfortunately, these changes make me wonder if we may need to change our Sunday Mass schedule sooner than I was planning, too. I hope to provide a framework for that conversation sooner rather than later. Your prayers on this front are appreciated.

In Christ, who is our strength,

J. Moore