



Dear parishioners,

A couple of months ago, we began our consultation on changes to Mass times. This has taken a bit longer than originally planned, as we've had to factor in a number of changes to the priests serving this area. These changes will come into effect at the end of the summer.

Fr Wiesław Garbacz from the Polish Catholic Mission is moving to take up a new appointment as Parish Priest of the Polish Catholic Parish in Swindon. His successor, serving Weston-super-Mare, Bridgwater, Yeovil and Taunton will be Fr Krzysztof Tyliszczak SChr. The Polish Mass will continue to be offered at midday on Sundays at St George's.

I am delighted to be able to announce that Mar Joseph Srampickal, the Bishop of the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain has appointed Fr Rajesh Anathil to serve the Syro-Malabar communities of Taunton and Exeter. Fr Rajesh will live at the Rectory at St George's. Although his primary role will be in providing pastoral care to the Syro-Malabar communities, he will also be able to provide some help for the wider parish. Currently, the Syro-Malabar rite is celebrated at St George's once a month. With Fr Rajesh's arrival, this will take place every Sunday.

At present there are four active diocesan priests serving the parishes of our deanery: Fr Michael Thomas in Minehead and Dulverton, Fr Frank Wainwright in Bridgwater and Burnham-on-Sea and Fr David and I here. Fr Michael is retiring and will be replaced as parish priest of Minehead and Dulverton by Fr David. Fr Frank is moving to take up a new appointment. The Bishop has no one to replace him, so the parishes of Burnham-on-Sea and Bridgwater will be served by supply priests until a successor to Fr Frank can be found. Thus, in the autumn there will be only two active Diocesan priests serving the deanery.

Given the reduction in the number of priests serving the area, we will unfortunately need to go ahead with reducing the number of Masses in our parishes. Thank you so much to all those who took part in the consultation process to help make a decision on Mass times. In the last phase of this, we asked people to vote on a series of options put forward by small group discussions at our parish open meetings. The results are available on our website. Perhaps unsurprisingly the overwhelming majority of people voted for the option that retained their existing Mass time. Thus, for example, of the 37 people from St Teresa's who participated in the survey, 36 expressed a preference for option E, the only option that retained the 11am Mass at St Teresa's.

There were a couple of significant exceptions to this rule. The first was at St John Fisher, where 40% of participants expressed a preference for their Mass moving to a Saturday evening and a further 10% chose this as their second option if the first couldn't go ahead.

The second exception was those who attend the 5.30pm Mass at St George's. None of the options put forward by the small groups at the parish open meetings included the retention of this Mass at St George's, so we also included an 'other' option to allow those who wanted to retain this Mass at St

George's to express this. Five people did this, but probably many more would have done so if we'd included this as an option.

We also asked people to express their preferred time for a Saturday evening Mass. The marked preference was to retain the existing 5.30pm Mass time.

After much prayer and discernment, the new Mass times will be:

Saturdays

5.30pm St John Fisher

Sundays

8am St George

9.15am St George

11am St Teresa

These new Mass times will come into effect on 27/28 August.

I am acutely conscious of the pain and challenges that this decision will bring to many people. It retains Masses in each parish and the option of a 'low' Mass at 8am for those who prefer not to have music, but I'm very aware that this is the least bad option that we could think of rather than a positive move and will impact negatively on many. Those most impacted are those who currently attend the 5.30pm Mass at St George's and those who come to 11.15am at St John Fisher.

There are possible benefits for the Wellington parish – the current Mass time is close to lunchtime and makes it difficult for people to stay on afterwards. The new Mass time allows the possibility of Saturday evening social events after Mass. 40% of people preferred this Saturday evening Mass time. This still leaves a majority who did not and will no doubt be very difficult for some.

I'm acutely conscious of the difficulties that this decision presents for those who currently attend the 5.30pm Mass at St George's. Whilst it is difficult for all those attending this Mass, it presents a particular problem for those who come to this Mass because it is the only feasible time for them. In our initial survey, 75% of those attending the 5.30pm Mass said they would prefer to continue coming to St George's at a different time, but this still left 25% who said that the time was the most important thing for them and they would prefer travelling to a different church to keep the same Mass time. St John Fisher is considerably further away – a 16 minute drive from St George's, as opposed to the other option of St Teresa's which is only 6 minutes drive away. For people coming from the Northern and Western parts of the parish it is even further. For those who don't drive it is even more difficult. I was deeply moved to receive a card from someone who works in a care home from 7.30 to 16.00 and so is unable to get to Sunday Mass and also doesn't drive, expressing the difficulties that moving the Saturday evening Mass would present for her.

Please do come and talk to me or any of the pastoral team about the changes and anything we can do to help support you in them. I'd be grateful also for your prayers also, particularly for those who will find this change most difficult.

Yours in Christ,