

EFFECTIVE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 1, 2020, we will have two 7:00am Masses on Sundays at St Raphael. The English Mass will move to the Parish Hall and a new Spanish 7:00am will be celebrated in the Church, in addition to the Spanish Masses at 8:30am, 12:30pm, 5pm & 7pm.

BACKGROUND ON MY DECISION:

When I arrived at St Raphael 11 years ago, our parish was quite different. I had come from a parish that was a mini version of St Raphael. I came with skills to run a large parish and school but lacked proficiency in Spanish. My pastoral staff included Dc. Rubén Quinteros and Fr. Yoban. Those were difficult days for me adjusting to this large parish, but I managed with the help of my associates, your patience, and my philosophy of slow and steady.

At that time, Fr. Langley was still celebrating the 7:00am Mass for me 3 times a month. I remember the concern of many of those who went to that Mass thinking I was going to cancel it, because the attendance hovered around 100 people. I told everyone that was not my intention. Years later, when Father Langley died, so many were sure I was going to cancel the Mass. I assured everyone, that was not going to happen because our parish priests would pick up the slack. Attendance was still around 100 people or so.

St Raphael has changed over the years, but one thing has remained constant in the parish since 2001 and that is that this parish is largely a Hispanic parish. The percentage of Latinos to native English speakers has not changed much; 86% Hispanic and 14% non-Hispanic. On an average Sunday at English Masses there are about 300 people at the 4:00pm, 120 people who attend the 7:00am Mass, and 450 at the 10:30am Mass. On the other hand, the average attendance at the Spanish Masses is 1,200 at the 8:30am Mass, 1,300 at the 12:30pm Mass, 650 at the 5:00pm and 500 at the 7:00pm Mass.

What many of our parishioners who attend the 3 English Masses do not see is this reality at our Spanish Masses.

Pre-pandemic, each weekend I would see hundreds of people standing at the back of church, in the narthex and vestibule because there were no seats left in the church at the two morning Masses. Many times, when I had the 7:00am Mass with about 120 people I thought to myself that these people could easily fit into the other two English Masses allowing me to create an additional Mass to ease the pressure off those morning Masses.

Currently with the restrictions we have on seating capacity, our Spanish Masses are fuller with each passing week with several Masses hitting the 400 Max capacity. People are starting to stand again because of lack of pew space.

After prayer and reflection, I made this decision based on what is right and just for everyone. I consulted with my associates, my staff, and our pastoral council about several possibilities. At first, I thought about simply changing the Mass to Spanish, but having an English Mass in the parish hall at the same hour might help those who cannot attend the other two English Masses.

Some of you may be thinking the following:

QUESTION: *Why not have this new Spanish Mass in the Hall and leave the English Mass in the church?* **ANSWER:** The hall will be able to seat around 100 parishioners whereas the Church can hold up to 400 during this pandemic. In a short amount of time, the 7:00AM Spanish Mass will be full. The English Mass attendance has been stagnant for many years.

QUESTION: *Why can't some of those who attend morning Masses change to the evening Masses?* **ANSWER:** Like many English speakers, Latinos like to go to Mass early as well, so they have the rest of the day to spend with their family.

QUESTION: *Why not simply add another Spanish Mass at 2:00PM?* **ANSWER:** No one likes a Mass at 2:00PM in the afternoon on a Sunday. Currently we have a 2:00PM Mass only for our first communicants.

QUESTION: *Is this temporary during the pandemic or a permanent change?* **ANSWER:** Although the pandemic is what motivated me to make this change, this move is permanent. We will have to evaluate the English Mass at some point because it is unsustainable to have 10 Masses each weekend for our priests to cover not counting weddings and other special Masses that are celebrated on weekends.

Change is not easy for anyone. I suspect some of you will feel put out or feel like your needs are not being listened to. Some may simply stop going to Mass or move to another parish. I must listen to the needs of everyone and listen to how the Lord speaks to my heart. For me, this decision is about taking care of the needs of the many. I challenge all of you who disagree with me to look beyond your personal needs and see what is best for our entire parish. Pray for your priests and our parish.

May God bless each of you, —Father John Connell