

***The First Sunday of Lent***  
***Homily ~ March 12-13, 2011***

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***Blessed Sacrament Parish***  
***Burton, Michigan***

I am sure that these past weeks have been filled with lots of questions and concerns about what is happening at Blessed Sacrament and what the future holds.

Perhaps a little background might help.

Several years ago all the parishes of the Diocese participated in a study of their mission and purpose. In view of shifting populations and availability of clergy, how is their mission being met? Some of the points considered were:

- the number of households served,
- the availability of priests
- the pooling of resources,
- and the proximity of neighboring parishes.

Some of the criteria asked of each parish:

- ✓ How many baptisms are celebrated each year?
- ✓ How many people are joining the church through RCIA?
- ✓ How many people are using its services?
- ✓ How is the parish doing financially?
- ✓ What is the average age of the parish membership?

The Genesee County Region, which is the largest in the Diocese, had the most changes of all seven regions. Four parishes were closed in the North End—Sacred Heart, St. Agnes, St. Luke, and St. Leo. Parishioners from those parishes were invited to join neighboring parishes. Because of the volume of households served, St. John in Davison was assigned two full-time priests. St. John Parish has over 3,000 households with 7,753 souls from 54 Zip Codes.

From the study it was felt that there is a viable community here at Blessed Sacrament; but in the event that a full-time pastor is needed somewhere else, Blessed Sacrament would be served by the two priests in Davison and Blessed Sacrament would be designated as a “chapel site.”

What does that all mean?

1. Blessed Sacrament is staying open! **BLESSED SACRAMENT IS NOT CLOSING!!**
2. Masses will be offered here every weekend. It is necessary to combine the two Masses on Sunday. Starting Sunday, March 27, Sunday Mass will be at 9:30 a.m.
3. Because there is a 4:30 p.m. Mass on Saturday in Davison, we need to move the Saturday Mass here back a half hour. So, starting on Saturday, March 26, Mass at Blessed Sacrament will be at 6:00 p.m. providing attendance holds up.
4. Religious education will continue to be offered here at Blessed Sacrament. We will be looking at new times and programs in the fall.
5. Eventually, we will be merging the parish councils and finance councils, so that there is one for both parishes. Our councils will be meeting together here on Saturday, April 9. Likewise, we'll be publishing one bulletin and Blessed Sacrament will be included on the St. John website. When someone calls either place, the caller will be greeted with the names of both churches.
6. As a member of either parish, there will be the option of attending any of the Masses on the weekend. Two daily masses are available in the St. John (Davison) chapel Monday through Friday at 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. No matter where you attend, your offering will be properly recorded.
7. Along with myself, Father Carl Simon will be with you, as well as Deacon Dan Fairweather. I am sure that you appreciate that at time, as pastor, I cannot be here with you. I am also Vicar for our region and oversee our 19 sister parishes.
8. This July I would like to offer a summer vacation Bible school here at Blessed Sacrament. If you would like to help by being on the team, please let me know.

I want to compliment you on your tremendous dedication and hard work to make Blessed Sacrament what it is—little parish with such a big heart. I compliment you on your surroundings. They are clean, well kept and maintained, and very inviting. I thank you for your warm welcome. I ask your patience as we begin to work and to serve together. We have much work to do.

We are living in a time when the awareness of God is fading away. Closer to home, in many of our Catholic households people are settling for a new normal—less prayer, less attendance at church, less participation in the sacraments.

Like many dioceses, the Diocese of Lansing is experiencing critical declines. From 2001 to 2009 the population of the Diocese grew by 2.9%. The Catholic population declined by 3.25%. Mass attendance declined more than five times that rate—16.35%.

Decline in Mass attendance lead to other declines in the life of the Church:

- 44% less marriages
- 18% fewer First Communions
- 32% fewer baptisms.

More and more people are living in indifference with no religion at all. Our society increasingly encourages a kind of practical atheism in which people go about their daily lives as if God does not exist! Indifference to God leads to indifference to the needs of the weak and the vulnerable. When we don't believe that we have a Father in heaven, we find it harder to live as brothers and sisters on Earth.

We have work to do.

I am reminded of St. Francis. While in prayer before the crucifix, Jesus spoke to Francis from the cross. "*Francis, I need you to rebuild my Church.*" At first Francis thought Jesus wanted him to repair the little chapel that was in ruins at the foot of the hill. Jesus was talking about rebuilding his Church—finding the lost, the overlooked, the forgotten, the lonely, the seeking, the living stones of God's building.

It's not about building. It's about people. People and God. God and people.

As I pledge my every effort to be at your service, I invite you to join me in renewing the purpose of Blessed Sacrament—*the little parish with a big heart!*

