

Tridentine Community News

December 11, 2011 - Third Sunday of Advent

The Quandary of Personal Parishes – Part 2 of 3 To Share or Not to Share

Today we continue our discussion of the pros and cons of Personal Parishes for the Extraordinary Form. In 1988 and the immediately subsequent years following their formation, the Priestly Fraternity of St. Peter (FSSP) and Institute of Christ the King (ICRSP) were more interested in gaining a foothold in North America than in establishing parishes of their own. The early years consisted largely of their priests commuting about, celebrating Tridentine Masses for communities that shared parish facilities with Ordinary Form congregations. The need existed because of a lack of available, interested local clergy.

As time went on and an increasing number of diocesan and religious order priests learned the Tridentine Mass, the FSSP, ICRSP, and similar groups refocused their efforts on administering communities or parishes exclusively dedicated to the Extraordinary Form. The usual term for such an arrangement is a “Personal Parish”, signifying that the parish in question is non-territorial and created to serve a particular “personal” need of the diocesan bishop. Sometimes the term “oratory” is used for the same purpose. Canonically, an oratory is a non-territorial parish, not to be confused with a church run by the Oratorian Fathers, such as the Oxford or London Oratories.

Financial Realities

On the surface, a Personal Parish might look like a good thing. No worries about set-up and take-down of the church to switch between Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms, presumably fewer parish politics, greater freedom to conform the parish schedule to Tridentine events. Peel the skin off the onion, however, and other challenges raise their heads, finances being Issue #1.

Consider St. Josaphat: The Novus Ordo Community deserves our deepest gratitude for preserving and sustaining the parish before the Tridentine Community arrived in 2004. Their ongoing monthly fundraising dinners have for years provided key revenue that kept the parish solvent and out of debt. Today, however, the Ordinary Form Community could not financially sustain St. Josaphat on its own. Neither can the Tridentine Community, despite its higher attendance and higher offertory collections. It’s approximately a 50/50 arrangement financially; we need each other. Until the Tridentine Community can at least double its financial contributions, the notion of turning St. Josaphat into a Personal Parish for the Extraordinary Form is not viable. *Sharing a parish is the only current practical option, unless a priest and cost-sharing venture with another Tridentine Community can be established.* The priest sharing concept has been discussed with the Flint and Windsor Tridentine Communities, and a joint budget has been drawn up, but the idea can go nowhere unless the Archdiocese of Detroit indicates interest in such an arrangement.

The financial impediment to a Personal Parish is in large part due to the fact that metropolitan Detroit and Windsor now have so many churches offering the Extraordinary Form. We’re not Pittsburgh, which has the largest EF Personal Parish attendance-

wise in North America; that parish also happens to be the sole Tridentine Mass site in the diocese. We’re not St. Louis, which has the second largest EF Personal Parish, but only two other, small EF sites in the region. Rather, here we enjoy 13 Tridentine Mass sites, plus four Novus Ordo Latin Mass sites, providing many options for those who prefer Latin Liturgy. Attendance is spread out across these numerous churches.

Though this column series does not directly deal with the Diocese of London, readers might be curious about Windsor’s Assumption Parish, too: Assumption is busier than most downtown Detroit churches, with numerous Masses and activities serving different constituencies. The Tridentine Community is the smallest of the several at the Parish. The Diocese has closed many smaller parishes in Windsor, thus it is unavoidable that the Windsor Tridentine Community will share a church with a larger Ordinary Form Community. The upside is that Assumption is, and will be over the long term, one of the best-preserved, most widely-supported historic Catholic churches in the area. It’s not going away; quite the contrary, it’s enjoying an unprecedented \$9,800,000 capital campaign to restore the building and campus. The downside of such security is that the Tridentine Community is unlikely to experience significant growth given its 2:00 PM Sunday Mass time. A Personal Parish in Windsor is not economically feasible in the foreseeable future; Assumption’s Latin Mass Community runs very smoothly as is.

Rome’s Viewpoint

In the turbulent early days of St. Josaphat’s Tridentine Community, this writer sought the counsel of the Vatican’s Ecclesia Dei Commission. Perhaps the FSSP could make things run smoother and deal with then-unpleasant diocesan politics? The answer: A resounding “no.” We were told to overlook the inconveniences and realize that that there was a higher calling for our community: an opportunity if not a responsibility to expose and train diocesan clergy in the Tridentine Mass. Initial reaction: Aww, come on, that sounds like work! In retrospect, it was one of the wisest pieces of advice the Detroit and Windsor Tridentine Communities have ever received. We have trained over 30 priests on both sides of the border, providing a depth of celebrants that could not have been achieved had we had the comfort zone of a resident FSSP priest. Many of those celebrants have gone on to start Tridentine Mass sites of their own. Furthermore, the necessity of identifying, training, and scheduling celebrants has created a sense of urgency on the part of our volunteers that might not have been present in an FSSP operation. It has resulted in a drive to have the best music, the best vestments and altar supplies, the best trained altar servers, and so forth, all in a desire to render to almighty God the most perfect worship possible.

Next week we will survey the existing Personal Parishes.

Tridentine Masses This Coming Week

Mon. 12/12 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *St. Josaphat* (Feria of Advent)
Tue. 12/13 7:00 PM: Low Mass at *Assumption-Windsor* (St. Lucy, Virgin & Martyr)