

Pastor's Remarks

Parish Building Project

Francis of Assisi had been to war... he had been a prisoner of war for over a year and now that he had returned home. He was often found wandering outside the city walls. His crisis was one of meaning and love. What should he do now that he found the horrors of war so unbearable? What would be his future now that he no longer wished to be knight? He sat down in a small church of San Damiano whose walls were falling down and whose roof was open to the sky. The priest who was in charge of the small church had no means to take care of it. Francis simply sat in prayer and despair and listened. When he looked up, he saw the cross of the little church over the altar. The loving eyes of Jesus looked at him and Jesus spoke, "Francis, can't you see my church is falling down? Go! And rebuild it." When Francis saw the church around him in shambles he asked the priest if he could live in hut next to the church and rebuild it. He put one stone on top of the other until the little church was rebuilt. When he had finished there he went from church to church rebuilding all the little chapels of Assisi. It was only then that he realized that the call from God was to rebuild the Church with a Capital C - the Church of God's people.

There are times of challenge and even crisis in the Church and even in our parish. The founders of our parish found themselves with a great challenge when they started in the 1970's to create a new parish. Without their will and effort we would not be here today. We would not be a community striving to listen to the will of God. Without their vision we would not have a church building to gather in, halls to celebrate and socialize in, places to work and places to serve as God has asked us. Today we also face a challenge just as large and important.

Within about a year of my arrival in this parish, we had nighttime rain storm that was about 3 inches of rain in a couple of hours. When I arrived for mass at 7:00 in the morning I walked into the church and heard a squishing sound under my feet – water had entered the church. I went ahead and prayed mass and asked people for help in emptying out the storage room behind the confessional where the water came from. It turned out that the down-spouts from the roof of the church were located inside the walls of the storage room. When the cast iron pipes were installed, one of the pipes was too short and the builder decided to prop it up with a piece of wood. Under the pressure of the water coming through the pipe that piece of wood slipped out and the pipe then dumped water and hail into the church. At the same time water came in through the walls of the administrative offices on the east side of the building because those walls were not properly constructed and sealed to keep out water. Water poured in through the doors of the main lobby because the slope of the parking lot wasn't taken into account when the administration wing was added to the building. I knew then that in addition to drying the building out, I needed professional assistance to make a determination about the health of the buildings. I asked Scott Stafford from Greer Stafford architects to take a serious look at our buildings. He brought in many professionals to look at the structure, others to look at heating and plumbing, electrical and any number of others that assisted him to assess our buildings. Scott reported to me that there were many repairs and upgrades that needed to be done. For example, we have 17 air conditioning units in all of our buildings; only 2 of those were in fair condition, the other 15 are in need of

replacement. The electrical in many parts of the building is not installed in proper conduit and will need to be rewired. The carpet in the church needs to be replaced, but that can't be done until we have a plan to replace the pews since they are too are in need of replacement. If we remove the carpet then we should replace the assistive listening system which as installed is too weak to fill the space with enough sound to be of great assistance... the list only grows... the longer we wait. This building was built with materials and technology that was intended to last for 35 to 40 years. We are at that mark right now. To bring the building up to code and to make the necessary upgrades to our buildings, to ensure the safety of all who gather here, it would take more than 6 million dollars' worth of repairs and upgrades. (For those of you who wish, the complete detailed report is on the parish website.) It is clear that something must to be done to address these needs soon. This is our challenge and more importantly, our opportunity. We haven't been a parish that has shied away from challenges and we will not be one now.

I have discussed these things at several meetings over the last couple of years with the finance council and the parish council. After careful consideration they have made a recommendation that the parish should consider replacing this building with new construction. I agree with the finance council's assessment that it is wiser stewardship to consider this option at this time. I have met with Archbishop Wester and he has given us the go ahead to consider further the option of a new church and administrative offices for our parish.

That we might accomplish this task with great attention to our parish and the people we serve, we will have a process of 11 meetings that begin with three meetings scheduled for September 11th, 12th, and 13th. These sessions are dedicated to learning more about what Christ and the Church asks of us during this time but much of the time will be used to work on our vision by carefully listening to each other. I am personally excited to hear from you about your experiences and expectations of who we are as a parish. (There is a calendar with an outline of the meetings and topics in the bulletin.)

Taking our cue from St. Francis we need to hear this as good news. There is nothing that brings a community together faster than a challenge. In many ways we have the same mission as he does, to rebuild the church. But he not only built walls and places of worship, he built up people and introduced them to Christ who brought meaning to their lives. I believe that this is part of the good news that we will need to celebrate as we move forward with this building project. It will not only bring us together but help us to build one another up into a community of faith and joy. It will introduce us to the greater possibilities to which Christ is calling us.

Our vision should not just be a beautiful place of worship, but a church full of people of all ages at worship of God the Father, through the Holy Spirit, in Christ Jesus Our Lord. As we embark on this journey, this pilgrimage, we will grow in our understanding of what this parish is and what it is meant to be. We cannot remain here; this building has served us well, but it is no longer capable of holding and serving our mission. All pilgrimages end with a return to where you began, but you do not return the same person, or in this case the same parish. It is this vision that I have: that at the end of this pilgrimage we are a community of great hope; that we will be a stronger community of worship and care, a clearer and stronger image of Christ in the world.