

WELCOME AREA AT ST. JOSEPH THE WORKER

Fundraising effort, January 12/13, 2008

Dear parish member and fellow steward,

Having discussed this with all in parish leadership, including our parish Finance and Pastoral Councils and our Renovation committee, and having received approval from the Bishop and his advisers, I have decided to go ahead with renovation plans to build a "Welcome area" at St. Joe's. All things being equal, construction will begin on Easter Monday of this year and be finished to coincide with our 50th Anniversary Mass in June. Below you will find some of the reasoning, gleaned over several years and from various sources, that I would like you to consider while making your decision on what, if anything to give. The estimated cost will come in under \$300,000.00 but, as well as money set aside in existing accounts, we have already received early pledges and donations both large and small. We will need your financial help however if this project is to be a success. We do have sufficient funds in our accounts to pay for the 2010 reroofing of our buildings, to do work on our windows and for other sundry items but this new adventure does present us with a financial challenge. Nobody wants the cupboard to become bare. Please think of this as being something that will benefit the parish as a whole but also as a way to thank God for His many blessings over the years.

There are many reasons which make this project desirable and these include both the liturgical and pastoral. The liturgy is seen by the Church as the greatest expression of our Faith. Usually this revolves around the sacraments, an integral part of the Church as Sacrament, but other rites and rituals are important also. While, especially since our renovation of a few years back, the Eucharist is celebrated in pleasant, comfortable and edifying surroundings, we have tended to "make do" in certain areas. The ability to better welcome and evangelize is a pastoral must.

- Baptisms are ideally celebrated during Mass but not during Advent and Lent and so we find ourselves cooped up in a very poky area in the vestibule of our church and it does neither justice to the beautiful liturgy or to the joy of the families involved. A great day is made less so and the possibility of ministering to, and evangelizing, certain families is often stifled. In order that the sacraments be celebrated during Mass, parents must be in good standing with the Church -- especially with regard to marital status -- and so increasingly baptisms are celebrated outside Mass. We already have to send people away without any form of fellowship to accomplish this in the church; hence, the "skiddaddle" rule.
- The introductory elements and rites in funerals and weddings would be affected positively, as would the celebration of the Easter Fire and Candle ceremonies and other important liturgies -- Palm Sunday, Good Friday, etc. The possibilities for liturgical environment would be improved greatly, also.
- Greeting and bidding farewell, especially by the pastor but also by the ushers, is very important and would be enhanced by more space. This is especially true when other works must be accomplished also.

- Quiet time or prayer, before and after Mass, is important with regard to enhancing the atmosphere of holiness within the church proper and for our growth in the Faith. The Church stresses this more and more, hence, no music for 10 minutes before Mass. A gathering space apart would encourage this. Some smaller prayer or study groups might also benefit as might certain forms of counseling.
- When various parish, charitable or Catholic school events are in the offing, sign-up sheets, handouts, etc. are necessary, bulletins and other literature often need to be distributed and items picked up - not to mention the selling of candy bars and the like - and it can at times be quite chaotic. Our church mirrors an overcrowded market at times where there is little ease – little space. This area would assist in the distribution of Catholic booklets, videos and other tools of evangelization also.
- Our cry room serves us well enough, but for those times when parents need to bring their little children out of the church, a comfortable place to sit and still see and feel part of the liturgy, would be desirable. We shall also be placing a single stall, handicapped accessible, restroom out there to accommodate the emergency needs of both old and young.
- The RCIA and other Faith Formation would also be greatly enhanced as certain classes, sacramental prep and the like, could be held near to the Lord's real presence in the tabernacle.

I could go on but I'll finish with what I feel to be the most important reasoning behind the creating of a "Welcome Area" – and really the word welcome says it all. We were built as a modern church and so should strive to keep up with the times. In these times younger people expect more, and if we wish to hand down the faith, we must strive to accommodate them wherever possible. A gathering area is essential. Though protestant churches are ahead of us in this respect, we are catching up and even the Cathedral has built one. Wherever a gathering space has been added, numbers increase and church spirit grows. People have more of an opportunity to get to know their fellow parishioners and to feel relaxed in a holy and friendly atmosphere. They become more one with the church, get more involved and the church grows. Not only do we give thanks to God for fifty wonderful years, but we also make a statement that whatever else might be happening in Mankato, St. Joe's is here and here to stay.

"The new gathering space will be well used by the parishioners for years to come. We commend you for your diligence in going forward with this project and we wholeheartedly give our approval..... Congratulations, and may your project progress smoothly and reach completion as planned." (Bishop Bernard J Harrington, November 12, 2007.)

So let's be good stewards pulling together, and pooling together, for love of St. Joe's and for the greater glory of God. May He bless you all. Fr. Wilmot.