11/1 & 2/14 Feasts of All Saints & All Souls / 6th Anniversary

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Syracuse, NY

Reflection on Parish Planning

I’d like to begin by wishing us all a “Happy 6th Anniversary”. It is amazing how we have grown in the short time of six years into such a vibrant faith community. It is a tribute to the leadership of Fr. Fred and the parish staff…it’s also a recognitio**n** of the many and wonderfully diverse gifts that we all bring to the life of the parish…and above all, most importantly,…it is testimony to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Several weekends ago, Fr. Fred, in his “State of the Parish” homily, noted that we are about to enter into the next phase of our development as a parish…and I’d like to share with you a couple of areas the Pastoral Council has been working on to prepare us for the future…and that led the Council to recommend that we initiate a capital fund drive here at All Saints.

The first of these issues is the renovation of the Bishop HarrisonCenter facility. When the Pastoral Council decided with the support of the parish community to purchase the Harrison Center, we envisioned it becoming not only a center for all of our parish activities but also as being a vibrant community center…a place where neighborhood and local groups, organizations, agencies and individuals could conduct their programs and activities, provide their services or hold their events.

With this in mind, the parish Buildings and Grounds Committee drew up a renovation plan for the building. Many of you may already have seen the renovations to the space on the first floor which is being rented by the Spiritual Renewal Center. The plan also calls for the remodeling of the large room at the South end of the first floor as well as the offices and bathrooms on the mezzanine level all of which will house the parish offices.

The plan for the lower level of the Harrison Center calls for the construction of seven classrooms which will be flexible in design and large enough to accommodate not only faith formation classes but also for all kinds of smaller group activities.. The open community space will accommodate 168 persons sitting at round tables; and the former kitchen space will be reconfigured into a new kitchen with new appliances and equipment and the addition of two new handicapped accessible bathrooms.

As has been the case with the renovations we have made to church and the former rectory since the beginning of the parish, it was the decision of the Finance Committee and the Council that, while reserving a portion of our investments for emergencies, the costs for the renovations to the Harrison Center including those currently underway would be funded from parish savings.

A word about our parish savings**…**when St. Therese and Our Lady of Solace parishes closed, the funds in each of those parish savings accounts were transferred to the new All Saints parish as were the proceeds from the sale of the Solace campus. Truly, all of us here at All Saints are indebted to the generosity of the former St. Therese and Our Lady of Solace communities.

In developing the plans for the Harrison Center, it was understood that in keeping with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the renovations would guarantee access for persons with disabilities from the ground level to the lower level of the Harrison Center. And so, the **i**nitial renovation plan recommended the installation of an elevator which was estimated to cost about $250k.

Council members were surprisedto hear the cost of installing an elevator. The architect explained to us that if we were to install the elevator within the building as it currently exists, we would run into a number of very costly infra-structure problemsthat would make it even more expensive. Thus the proposed plan would be to build a small addition to the North side of the building which would house the elevator. After reviewing the overall renovation plan, the Council concluded there were not enough funds in the renovation budget for an elevator. And so, as an alternate plan, it was suggested, that we install an inclined platform lift along the stairway leading to the upper and lower levels at a cost of $52k.

Both the Parish Disabilities Task Force and the Pastoral Councilreviewed this alternativeplan and concluded that a lift would accommodate most wheel chairs as well as individuals who use a walker and therefore be acceptable as ADA compliant. There was, however, concern that some people might find the lift difficult or intimidating to use. The general consensuswas, if the funds could be obtained, an elevator would be the preferred solutionnot only for persons with disabilities, but also for others who find themselves ‘mobility challenged’ …I count myself among that group… as well as for general public access. In the spirit of hospitality, we do not want people staying away from participating in events because they’re concerned about having to use stairs.

After much deliberation, the recommendation of the Pastoral Council was that we letthe community decide. If we are able to come up with adequate funds through a capital drive, we would install an elevator. If we are not able to obtain the funding, then we would install the lift as a fall back option.

During all the discussion about renovating the Harrison Center, a portion of the front ofthe church fell off revealing significant water and termite damage to the front of the church. While this was totally unexpected, it goes without saying that it is a repair that needs to be made. We finally received all the required permits on Friday, and repair work has already begun. It was also decided that, in response to numerous requests, we would construct an additional handicapped accessible bathroom in the church.

The second issue regarding our future considered by the Pastoral Council has nothing to do with buildings but concerns the expansion of our parish outreach mission…more specifically… to the SU campus. We have had conversations with the Alibrandi Center Board of Directors and the Dean of Hendrick’s Chapel and they have expressed enthusiasm about the possibility of All Saints collaborating with them in serving the campus community.

Moreover, the Diocese is currently engaged in planning for another reconfiguration of parishes given the projected shortage of priests within the next few years, and this raises questions about the future of every parish in Diocese. While there are no guarantees, the Council’s position is that if All Saints is already engagedon campus, if and when the time comes when there is no priest available to be assigned to the Alibrandi Center, there is a greater likelihood that All Saints would be among those officially designated to provide Catholic pastoral care to the SU community.

Therefore, the Pastoral Council has recommended the addition of a new full time staff position which would be responsible for beginning this collaboration on campus. This position would also be responsible for promoting and overseeing the overall use of the Harrison Center facility and for contributing to the spiritual development of the parish. The Council furtherrecommended that funds be added to the Capital Fund Drive goal to cover the costs of salary, benefits and office related expenses for this position for a period of two years. This would give us time to increase our overall parish income, including rental income from the Harrison Center as well as from the former rectory building, to a level that will sustain the costs for the new position on an ongoing basis.

A side note …most of you know Sr. Kathy Osbelt who is a member of the parish and serves on the preaching schedule. She was the founder of Francis House which for over 20 years now has provided hospice care to terminally ill patients. More recently she represented the Franciscan Sisters as the project manager for the building and recent opening of the Franciscan Villa. And it just so happens…call it coincidence…I prefer to see it as the work of the Holy Spirit…Sister is currently available for a new assignment and has expressed an interest in becoming a member of the All Saints parish staff and addressing the tasks outlined by the Pastoral Council.

And so the goal for the Capital Fund Drive has been set at $350k. $250k of the goal would be for the installation of an elevator. In addition and in accordance with the Diocesan salary guidelines for religious sisters, the goal includes a total of $100k to cover the costs the new staff position for the next two years. If we make our goal, we will be able to complete all our critical capital improvements and have the staff team we need to successfully face the future.

Two weekends from now, we will be asked to consider making a pledge to the Capital Drive. Pledges can be paid in installments over a 3- 5 year period however one chooses. On behalf of the Pastoral Council, I would like to thank you for your consideration.

I will be in the back of the church after Mass to answer any questions. Thank you.