

## **Comments for Open Forum**

**October 4, 2009**

**By Susan Piliero**

My thanks to you all for attending this forum, and to being involved and learning as much as you can about the facilities project and our campaign to raise the funds needed for these critical repairs.

I grew up an “army brat”: my dad was a career officer, and we moved often; in fact, by the time I graduated from high school I had attended twelve different schools. That meant that we attended many different churches, across the United States and in Europe. My parents set a good example for their children, and we learned that it was our duty as a Catholic family to register with the church and become members, not just passers-by, even if we knew we would not be in that parish for long. I remember as a child I had my own little envelopes for giving at Sunday mass. My take away from these formative years was that church was an important responsibility, and that responsibility was both spiritual and financial. However, I must confess I did not feel a great sense of community in the parishes we became part of.

Over thirty years ago, my husband and I and our two small children moved to Ithaca to begin a new life here. Our kids received their sacraments here, including our third child who was born in Ithaca and baptized at St. Catherine's. We became part of a Seasons of Faith community to help educate our children in the Catholic faith, and we ourselves became involved in many of the ministries of the parish. My parents moved to Ithaca after their retirement; as well, our daughter and her husband live in Ithaca and are members of the parish, along with their young son, who was baptized here. So now there are four generations of my family who belong to the community that is St. Catherine's. This parish that has taught me what community means for a parish, and how much richer I am because of that community. The St. Catherine's community is family, and this parish is my spiritual home.

Just as I would strive to be supportive of my family, and share in their joys and challenges, so it is for my parish family. I feel I am called to help support my parish. I share in its joys and sorrows: when I witness the baptism of a young couple's newborn during the Sunday mass, when I read Banns of marriage announced in the bulletin, when we recognize our first communion children or our graduating seniors (wait, didn't they just make their first communion not too long ago?),

when we send the preschoolers over to the parish center for children's liturgy during the Sunday morning mass, when the choir shares a beautiful piece it has practiced to perfection for our benefit, when we mourn together at the funeral mass of a faithful parishioner, or our own pastor, Fr. Mahler. It is in this place that we as a community, as a family, are welcomed, challenged, and supported on our life journeys. My heartfelt thanks go to those founding members who made the vision of St. Catherine's a reality. We are now called to continue that vision and ensure the safety and beauty of our worship space and parish center for the next generation.

Stewardship means taking care of what you have been given and giving back to the best of your ability. Only God (and your financial advisor, if you have one...) knows what your household can give. Unlike some capital campaigns that name a room after a big donor or put a star up on the giving wall, this campaign will keep your gift confidential. I learned a valuable lesson from my parents about not judging others in this department. How many of us have friends, or siblings, or children who may have lost their job, or can't sell their house, or have crushing medical expenses? We ask only that you give what you can prayerfully afford. Pat Cote, our business manager, will know of course, and will be responsible for

tracking your contribution for tax purposes, but the rest of us who will not know the amount of your gift.

Imagine gathering with friends or family on Christmas day. How anxious we are that our loved one will like the gift we have given them, and how pleased we are when we see our gift is well received! Even little children who have worked on making a gift at school, for example, are very proud of their little work of art, and are very excited to see the reaction on their parent's face when the gift is opened. We as adults treasure these gifts more than gold. And so it is with our Heavenly Father.

That said, we are hopeful that everyone in the parish will support this campaign and give as generously as they can, so that we can make our goal. The grad student on a fixed assistantship with hefty loans, the couple with young children and costly day care expenses, the family with teenagers who seem to suddenly be needing a new pair of sneakers one size up every other month, the single person who worries about having to pay for expenses on his or her own – you may only need a “little envelope” to make your contribution, but for your Heavenly Father, your gift is cherished.

Thank you for coming to this forum, and for being a part of the community of St. Catherine's.