

Facilities Project Questions and Answers

Q1. Why don't we just repair the existing Parish Center?

A1. Many of us started out thinking this would be wise. However, we soon discovered that: (1) it would cost almost as much to repair the building and bring it up to code as to replace it; (2) the many programs that take place in the building daily would need to be carried out elsewhere at a substantial expense during the renovation; (3) even if the building were able to be renovated, it would not provide the square footage or improved traffic flow needed for St. Catherine's many ministries. For example, if a meeting is underway in the parish center's lounge, staff often must bring visitors through a garage to access private meeting rooms; (4) the building was initially built for joint purposes (a parish hall/center and the priest's residence) and not to accommodate the many ministries active today.

Q2. What are these ministries?

A2. There are many. A few examples: Small Faith Groups, Youth Religious Education, Sacramental Preparation, Adult Faith Formation, Centering Prayer Programs, Pastoral Counseling, Lectures, Book Club meetings, AA meetings, Youth Group Meetings, Funeral Receptions, Community Building Social Hours following Masses, the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA), the Rite of Christian Initiation for Children (RCIC), St. Catherine's preschool playgroup and Special Parish-wide gatherings such as Ash Wednesday Soup Suppers, Cabarets and International Harvest Festival.

Q3. What's wrong with these staff offices as they are?

A3. The offices were intended to be priest's bedrooms. Their

doors do not have windows. The Diocese of Rochester now requires that doors to spiritual counseling rooms must have windows. The offices are not sufficiently soundproof for the spiritual direction, prayer and counseling that take place there.

Q4. The church building is beautiful. Why must we change it?

A4. What a gift from God this building is for our community. However, it will be 50 years old in 2012. Its heating/air conditioning system is living on borrowed time. The church building's roof has an expected life of 40 years. The cedar shakes are crumbling and coming off. There is no sprinkling system. The existing crying room in the church is far too small and hot. There is only one handicapped restroom in either the church or the parish center. The entrances to the church provide no space for gathering before and after mass, for social hours, or for volunteer signups. There is no space in the church to advertise parish programs, ministries or events.

Q5. I've heard something called a narthex discussed. What is it and why do we need it?

A5. A narthex is a gathering space at the entrance of church. It could connect the church and the parish center. A narthex provides a gathering space that is separate from the sacred worship space. Providing a quiet, sacred space for worship goes a long way toward improving liturgy. Some examples of a narthex in use are on St. Catherine's website, stcathofsiena.org.

Q6. How much will all this cost?

A6. It depends on what the parish decides to do. The estimated cost of a bare bones repair of the church and the parish center is 1.5 million dollars. If we repair the church and replace the parish center with a new building that is about the same size,

the cost would be approximately 3.9 million dollars. If we add a narthex that connects the new parish center with the church and enhance a few church spaces, the cost would be 4.6 million dollars. If we add more space in the new parish center to accommodate additional unfilled program needs, the cost would grow toward a maximum of approximately 6.7 million dollars.

Q7. How will we know how much the Parish can afford to spend?

A7. The Pastoral Council has authorized a financial capacity study be undertaken in March to determine how much money may be able to be raised. The results of this study will be communicated to all parishioners in June from the pulpit, via e-mails and church bulletin inserts and through a parish-wide forum.

Q8. When will a final decision be taken on whether to proceed with construction and who will make it?

A8. After extensive communication with parishioners and after soliciting their feedback, the Pastoral Council will make a final recommendation on the project to Father Mahler in October.

Q9. What has been the average number of parishioners over the last 5-10 years?

A9. Avg. Mass attendance from 2000-2008 = 705. Registered parishioner households = 578 currently; 680 prior to re-registration census of 2007. Note: in this reregistration many "old" names were discovered and removed.

Q10. What has been the trend, if any, in parish membership over the last 5-10 years?

A10. Down then up. Mass attendance had decreased from a high of 791 (avg.) in 2002 to a low of 616 in 2006, but has

rebounded in the last two years to 673 in 2008. This trend compares favorably to other parishes in our area (all others steadily down except for All Saints, which is slightly up).

Q11. What is parish membership expected to be over the next 5-10 years?

A11. It depends on which demographic trends continue. Overall, Mass attendance has declined nationally. However, our Mass attendance is currently increasing. Demographics for our parish area were predicted in 2005 to show “low growth” from 2004-2009. New, unforeseen trends will affect membership in different ways. New facilities will likely attract more people.

Q12. The websites of area parishes indicate a widely varying number of members. Is there a “critical mass” of members that must be met for a Bishop to allow a parish to continue to be viable, either as a stand-alone parish or as part of a cluster?

A12. No. Numbers are considered along with a variety of other factors. In a metropolitan area a parish of 800 households could be clustered. In a rural area a much smaller parish could be a cluster candidate. Also, a parish might be viable, not as part of a cluster, but as a stand-alone, with its own lay pastoral administrator and shared sacramental ministers/priests. A parish that is not viable as part of a cluster or as a stand-alone would be a candidate for closure.

Q13. What other criteria does a Bishop consider in determining whether a parish continues to be viable?

A13. Size, condition of facilities, demographics, fiscal viability, strength of staff, and vitality of ministry and programs are some of the criteria.

Q14. Where does St. Catherine’s stand opposite this criteria, in the Bishop’s view?

A14. The bishop's view is not known but can be surmised. St. Catherine's is viable and/or flourishing in all categories. And, it was not clustered in the reorganization done in 2005.

Q15. Immaculate Conception Parish has a large church and renovated facilities, All Saints has a new church and a large separate meeting hall, the Cornell Catholic community has two priests and uses Sage Chapel. Why doesn't St. Catherine's affiliate with these parishes and use their facilities?

A15. A need for new/renovated/repared facilities alone is not considered adequate rationale for such a major disruption of the life and ministry of a flourishing faith community. Such a move would, in effect, constitute the closure of St. Catherine's as a parish.

Q16. The Pastoral Council will make a recommendation to Fr. Mahler in October. What if Fr. Mahler needs to step down for health reasons, would a successor be locked-in to the facility option decision taken by Fr. Mahler?

A16. Father Mahler is anticipating in the next month a clean bill of health from his physicians. Should a pastorate suddenly become vacant, the new pastoral leader (priest or lay pastoral administrator) is not bound by previous decisions. However, a new pastoral leader is expected to have common sense, to respect the value of ministry continuity, and not to institute major changes in the first year or two of his/her tenure.

Q17. What if Fr. Mike is not reappointed by the Bishop in June? How would this affect the facilities project?

A17. All indications point to the likelihood that a reassignment of the pastor this June is no more than a very remote possibility. [See above for the sudden and unexpected pastoral vacancy.]

Q18. Do the figures quoted for the various facilities options include interest payments, if these projects are financed by mortgage loan borrowing?

A18. No, interest expense is not included.

Q19. Is the feasibility study now being conducted in our parish based on “promises” of donations? In an actual fundraising campaign how closely do promised donations and actual ones line up?

A19. The Study seeks to discover what parishioners likely would pledge, if a campaign actually were begun. There is usually some slippage. In a campaign St. Catherine’s completed in 2004, the money actually received was approximately four-percent less than the total pledged.

Q20. What are the financial repercussions for the parish if sufficient funding does not materialize after the facilities work is undertaken?

A20. The repercussions are unknown. However, our parish will consider all contingencies when it constructs its financial plan, if the decision is to proceed.

Q21. What are the possible repercussions for the diocese, if funds fall short after work has started?

A21. There are no repercussions for the diocese.

Q22. What were the conclusions of prior studies of St. Catherine’s facilities?

A22. Roof and infrastructure replacements were recommended as urgent as long ago as 1999. Other improvements were also recommended at that time, e.g., handicapped accessible restrooms.

Q23. If the conclusion was that work was needed, why was nothing done?

A23. In 1999, it was decided to do important interior work in the church to secure windows, improve the altar platform, create a new reservation area for the Blessed Sacrament, reconfigure pews around the altar, install a new floor and improve the parking lot and sidewalks. It was concluded that the church roof would need to wait for additional funding.

Q24. Is St. Catherine's parish currently solvent?

A24. Yes. The Parish's only long-term liability is a small outstanding loan on the priest's residence (see Q24). The church building and parish center are owned outright as is the 10 acres of land on which the facilities sit. While the properties have not been appraised (because StC doesn't pay taxes), the Parish's assets substantially exceed its liabilities.

Q25. What is the mortgage loan balance on the priest's residence?

A25. \$58,623 as of 3-23-09.

Q26. Given the tough economic times, what is the cost of deferring the facilities project?

A26. The risk of major damage to the Church and Parish Center from failed roofs and HVAC systems. Should the roof of the church fail, the cost to repair the interior of the church, while unknowable now, would be substantial. Should the HVAC system in the church fail, it would be impossible to repair because there are no replacement parts for a 45-year old system.

Q27. If some dire repair work cannot be deferred, what is it that must be done immediately and what could be deferred?

A27. Roof replacements are immediate needs. HVAC is living on borrowed time. Deferring replacement is risky.

Q28. Why can't the parish rent meeting space somewhere in the vicinity? Wouldn't this be more cost-effective than spending millions on capital improvements?

A28. Public facilities are unavailable to religious groups according to law. Other options are not immediately evident. The estimated dollar cost of such a move would be considerable in itself, plus, money would still have to be spent to maintain or demolish current facilities. The greatest cost would be in the loss of parishioners and the crippling of parish programs.

Q29. Has the Pastoral Council tapped into lessons learned from other parishes that have undertaken a similar major effort?

A29. Yes, the Council has interviewed other church officials who have undertaken major construction projects and reviewed lessons learned.

Q30. You are soliciting funds during one of the worst possible times to be undertaking such a project. Have you made your case compelling enough?

A30. We believe that we have done so. We have offered actual tours of our facilities, virtual tours on our website, professionally developed studies and numerous bulletin inserts and pulpit updates. Additionally, parish-wide forums have been held and will continue to be held into October to allow parishioners to express their views on the facilities study.

Q31. What is so special about St. Catherine's parish that I should remain here? In difficult economic times shouldn't I be seeking the greatest return on my spiritual/financial investment and go to another church where the financial demands would not be as great?

A31. Compared to many other parishes and faith communities St. Catherine's stands out in the size and strength of its staff, in the quality and quantity of its ministry programs, in the extent

of parishioner involvement in all aspects of parish life, and in the beauty and attractiveness of its church building.

“The grass is always greener...” Every parish has great financial needs. There are very few exceptions, and none locally.

Q32. I give a substantial portion of my income to “direct service” non-profits with low overheads. My disposable income is limited. If I pledge to give more to St. Catherine’s, I shall need to decrease my giving elsewhere. Why should I do this?

A32. Comparing other non-profits to the Church is comparing apples to oranges. The life and mission of the Church is unique. Only the Church engages the ultimate questions of the meaning, purpose, and destiny of human life and nurtures one’s relationship with God. How much is this worth? Support of the Church should be its own priority and in its own category, not relative to the support of other worthy causes.

Q33. Is the Feasible Study an attempt to prove that this project is needed or to determine how much the parish can afford to do?

A33. The purpose of the study is to find out how much the parish can afford to do.

Q34. I’ve heard it said that the parish center facilities are legal but not up to code. What is the difference between legal and up to code?

A34. The parish buildings have been grandfathered, as all organizations buildings have been, whenever new codes were enacted. In practical terms this means that the parish was not required to bring the old buildings up to code. Yet, if the parish now renovates the old buildings in anything more than a minor way, then the new codes would have to be met.

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