

One of the features of our renovated church will be a new altar. Whenever an altar is put into use in a Catholic Church, it is formally dedicated by a bishop. Bishop Finn is coming for the dedication mass, and a lot of you have said you'd like to be here for the ceremony. I'd like to formally invite you to come. There's only one problem – I don't know yet what day or time this will take place. I think it's going to happen next weekend at either the Saturday night or the Sunday morning mass, but the bishop was busy with the pope's visit last week, and he is still sorting through his schedule. So when you come next weekend, we might be having mass here, or we might be across the street. The bishop might be here, but he might not.

The dedication of an altar is an impressive ceremony. After the scripture readings of the mass, we sing the litany of the saints, inviting all of heaven to join our prayers on earth. The bishop offers a beautiful prayer recalling many of the events from the Old Testament and the New. He asks that the new altar will become a sign of Christ, from whose pierced side flowed blood and water. He also prays that it become a place of communion and peace, unity and friendship, praise and thanksgiving. He anoints the top of the altar with chrism, the same oil we use for once-in-a-lifetime sacraments: baptism, confirmation and ordination to the priesthood. We will light incense at the new altar and arrange candles around it. It will be a long mass, but the ceremony is quite beautiful.

Just a few practical things about the church: Some of the features of the building are not quite finished, including a new cross that will hang over the altar, the doors that go from the narthex to the nave, and some of the new pews. For a couple of weeks I may need to ask some of you who are willing to stand to offer seats to other members of the congregation. Most of the pews will be here, and the rest will arrive shortly; when they do, they will slightly increase our seating capacity.

You will see newly restored stained glass windows – our main window in the south of the church, as well as some that formerly hung in the Presbyterian Church across the street. You will see two new angel statues for the sanctuary, recalling some of the decoration from the original St. Munchin Church. You'll see our restored wooden floor, a new gathering space where we can visit before and after services, a new reconciliation room, restrooms, and a basement. I know you are anxious to see all of this, but I need to ask you to please stay out of the building one more week. The greatest danger is that someone will walk on our newly finished wood floors while they are still drying, and that would cause great problems.

After this week, please welcome anyone you know to come see our church – and worship with us. The First Letter of Peter says, "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." This can be easily done by showing off our church. Here is a building set aside for sacred purposes, a building that explains our faith in God, our love for one another, our concern for the world, and our hope for everlasting life.