

I'd like to bring you up to date on our special building project and then make my annual appeal for your regular contributions to the parish.

The scope of our building project remains the same. We plan to add space out front for visiting before and after mass, with restrooms, storage, a new sacristy and a new confessional. We also want to freshen up the interior of the church. Our total budget is \$620,000.

Shortly before Easter we put the project out to bid. We were expecting 6 contractors to participate, but only 2 did – one from Kansas City and the other from St. Joseph. Both bids came in high, about 20% over the construction budget. One choice was to accept the lower of these bids and eliminate some key parts of our project. But the building committee decided instead to reject those bids and solicit new ones. We now have 5 different contractors preparing their bids; all of them are either from the Cameron area or have worked on projects here. I expect those bids to be opened in early June.

Two years ago I asked you to support this effort with special contributions for 3 years, and you are doing so. Each week you can find the totals in the bulletin, and your generosity is impressive. Once we begin construction, we will go into debt and we will have interest payments on a loan. The more you give us now, the more interest we can build on our savings. All of you have difficult financial decisions to make, and so do we. If you are behind on your pledge, please catch up; if you've completed your pledge, we can always use a little extra.

This weekend I'm also asking you to make your annual pledge to our parish. Each week at mass we take up a collection for the day-to-day operation of our church. That collection shows your willingness to sacrifice for a greater good, spreading the gospel of Christ. Your gift is an offering of love to the church, and I thank you for your sacrifice.

We prepare our budget each fiscal year, so it is most helpful for us to know now what you think you can give over the next 12 months. When you make a pledge to the parish, you help us plan, and you set a goal for yourself. It's like making a resolution for Lent: You accept a sacrifice as a sign of love, as a result of your prayer, to atone for your shortcomings, and to thank God for your gifts. When you make a pledge, try to make an increase over last year's gift. It's a sacrifice, and it brings rewards.

At the Easter Vigil each year, those who are newly baptized carry the gifts to the altar: the bread, the wine and the collection. For the first time they present the gifts we all give, and for the first time they receive the gifts we all receive at communion. We give before we receive, and our communion makes us ready to give again. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. When we hear his voice, we follow him. He knows us and gives us eternal life. One way we follow Jesus is to give what we have. He promises he will give us even more.