

Our building renovation committee has spent long hours consulting, talking, dreaming, and planning. I've promised you I'd share their results, so I'll do that this week and next.

Two years ago this committee proposed to the parish that we build a two-story church, opposite the parking lot. We heard as much support for it as concern about it. You favored renovating, but you disagreed on how. Since a project that large needs broad support from the parish, the parish council asked the renovation committee to try again.

Our parish needs have remained the same. We need more adult meeting space with running water for coffee and ready access to restrooms. We need improved handicap accessibility, better classroom space, recognizable entrances to the school and church, economical lighting, and a church building which values beauty as well as simplicity--not a beauty of arrogance, but a beauty which inspires prayer and a sense of another world.

To meet our needs, we'd have to add rooms. We considered adding new classrooms on this north side of the building, and renovating our church. That would ^{also} work, but we're still left with a church which limits artistic potential and which sits in a spot inconvenient to the parking lot. Then we learned that for a cost increase slightly more than what we were already considering, we could add on to the north side not new classrooms, but a whole new church, single level, attached to this building. That would free up this space for the additional rooms we need. So this is the proposal the committee is making.

We considered several floor plans for the church, and the committee chose the most creative of them all. This church would look different from any other church in the diocese. Imagine this room sitting on the ground over there, turned sideways, taller, with natural light and wooden beams. Everyone would enter through one common space, where we could greet each other before Mass. Coffee and donuts would be available ~~out there~~ ^{at the entrance}. We'd enter the church past a large baptistry--a stationary one, not one on wheels. The baptistry ^{also} serves as a holy water fount. Now, get this: the pews sit on either side of one main aisle and the two halves of the church face each other. The altar stands in the middle. The priest's chair sits by the baptistry, and the pulpit is at the opposite end. This arrangement accomplishes some amazing things: It puts the altar in the middle, the focus of our attention, but it gives weight to the chair where I read the prayers and the pulpit where we read the Scriptures. It makes every seat close to some part of the Mass, and it lets everyone see the faces of other people.

For over a thousand years, when Mass was in Latin, and the priest had his back to the people, the people said their own private prayers and let the priest pray the Mass. In those days, it made sense for churches to look the way most of them do: oriented toward one end, where you wouldn't be disturbed by the faces of other people. But now, Mass includes the participation of the assembly: The people sing hymns, the people make responses, the people offer the sign of peace, the people read the Scriptures and distribute communion. A church floorplan like this would signal a revolution in architecture as English signaled a revolution for the liturgy. It's a bold plan, but it has

the power to enhance our singing and our sense of being a whole community at prayer.

Now I know if I took questions right now, we'd be here another thirty minutes, so I'm going to answer the two questions I think are on everybody's mind, and then I'll stay after Mass for more. The questions are these: "Be honest: Have you already decided to do this?" And "How are we going to pay for this?" The answers are: No, we have not already decided to do this. We do think this is the best plan to meet our needs. If we're wrong, we need you to tell us, but if we're right, we need your support. Next week we'll give you a survey card. If you know what you want to say, you can turn it right in; if you want to think it over, take a couple weeks. How are we going to pay for it? You'll have to come next week to hear the answer to that.

I encourage you to talk to each other, talk to us, and talk to God about this. Ask God to help us make a decision for the good of our parish today and for the future.

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