

## **Building Our Future Together**

These are exciting times at St. Mark. Rarely do you get the opportunity to build two churches at the same time.

Now, I know you are looking at me saying, “What the heck is he talking about – two churches?” Well, I will tell you.

The first church we are building...the most important church...is one that began about 2000 years ago. And that is the Spiritual Church. That is what ties us all together. That’s what makes us one family...one community. We are building our future together.

At this parish the majority of time, planning and effort is spent on building the spiritual church in each one of us.

The second church we are building is the Physical Church. And to be honest, this one has a lot more pizzazz than the Spiritual Church. I want to take this opportunity to give you an update on the Physical Church...and answer the following questions:

1. Where do we stand in the process?
2. What do we need to do next?
3. What is the plan and how will we accomplish it?
4. What does this mean to each one of us?

## **Why Now?**

We began walking on this road in the Fall of 2003 with the original Foundation for Our Future Pledge Campaign. Now, at times the road may have been a little curvy...and the road may have had its share of potholes...but it is our road. And it is the road that is going to take us to where we need to be.

As each of you know, this parish is growing by leaps and bounds. When we began the campaign to build the church, the parish had approximately 2,100 families. Today, our parish has over 3500 families...that’s a 66% increase in just over 3 years... and each month about 40 more families join our ranks.

Right now, of the 7 weekend Masses, only one – the 10:15 Family Mass – is at or near capacity. With our projected growth, by the summer of 2009 – just 18 months away – 5 of the 7 Masses are projected to be at or near capacity. 5 of 7. What does that mean? Well, if you want to be guaranteed a shot at a seat at Mass, you’re best bet is either the 7:00 am Sunday Mass, or the 3:00 Spanish Mass.

Gang, we are going to be full. So, it is vital that we have a new Physical Church completed by the summer of 2009.

## **Where are we in the Process?**

This may not be news to you. You may be saying, “Yeah, I know Tom, we have a lot of people. And we need a church. So, where are we in the process?”

Funding the church consists of 3 stages. The first stage is to collect cash. The Diocese requires that we have at least 40% of the projected cost in the bank. Since the campaign began in 2003, that is what we have been doing – amassing that 40% that is needed. And I am happy to tell you that we do have the necessary cash. So, Stage 1 is completed.

We are now on stage 2 of 3. To complete stage 2, the Diocese requires that we have at least 30% of collectible outstanding pledges. Here is the good news – we already have a head start on this stage. Because of everyone’s efforts not only with pledges, but with fundraisers, we are already making progress. So, what is the bottom line? What do we need to do to finish Stage 2? According to the Finance Council, we need an additional \$1.5 million in pledges before we can get approval to put a shovel in the ground. \$1.5 million – I’ll come back to that in just a minute.

Let me just briefly mention the third and final stage of paying for the church. Remember that Stage 1 was gathering the cash. That was 40% and has been done. Stage 2 is accumulating the necessary pledges. That was 30% and we are pretty close to completing that task, but have some work to do. Once we complete stage 2, we will be able to get approval to begin construction. Stage 3 is the remaining 30% -- which is the mortgage – the debt. Paying off that debt, which is stage 3, will begin no later than 2010. And I will let the Chair of the Pastoral Council at that time worry about the Stage 3 and the debt.

My worry is Stage 2 and the pledges.

## **What do we need to do Next?**

So, what do we need to do next? By now you know. It is to raise at least \$1.5 million in additional pledges. Is it possible? Absolutely! Will it be easy? Well, it never is. But we are going to get it done.

Let me tell you the plan. Next week, certain groups will get in the mail a letter with a customized message and pledge card. While there are 6 different letters, for simplicity sake, let me tell you the three main groups of people:

1. First are those parishioners, either new or old, who have made contributions, but have never formally pledged. This accounts for 470 families who have given money...which we greatly appreciate, but that have never signed a pledge card. If you are in that group, I first want to thank you for stepping up to the plate. I hope you realize how important it is in Stage 2 to sign a pledge card. While we always need cash, in Stage 2 we need collectible pledges. So, please pledge. Then pay. But pledge first.

2. Second are those parishioners, either new or old, who have never pledged, nor given any contribution that we could track. Unfortunately, this is a large group, but statistically, it is in line with other Catholic Churches. Please hear me clearly on this – we will be asking them for a pledge. We are asking everyone to pull their weight.

While members of this group did not pledge in the original campaign, my hope is that now that we are getting so close...now that we are just months away from putting a shovel in the ground...they will join us in financially supporting the Physical Church. Because it is now real, and not just a dream. My hope is they now realize what all of us know...that “If it’s to be, it is up to me.”

3. Which brings me to my third group -- and that group is those parishioners, either new or old, who have made a 3-year pledge, and have either already completed that pledge, or will complete it when the current pledge ends this December. I have a feeling that many of you sitting here today are in this group. First, on behalf of the whole parish, I want to extend my sincere thanks for the efforts and sacrifices that you have made in completing your pledge. But the fact remains – without your continued support, we cannot build this church. If it’s to be, it’s up to me.

As much as I’d like to tell you that your task is complete...that you’ve finished the job...that others will take it from here...that is not the case. To build this church, we need you in each stage. We need you to make another 3-year pledge. That is the only way a Physical Church will be built.

If it’s to be...it’s up to me.

Again, all three categories will be asked to pledge and to pull their weight. We need everyone’s help. We are in this together. Let me mention that there are 2 groups that will be getting letters in January, but will not be receiving pledge cards. The first group is those that signed a 3-year pledge, and then extended their pledge for an additional year. They still have one year left on their pledge. The second group is those that originally signed up for a 5-year pledge, and have two years left on their pledge. So, if you still have more than 12 months left on your pledge, we simply ask that you keep fulfilling your pledge. However...rest assured...when your pledge ends, you will be getting another pledge card in the mail. Why? We are all in this together, and we need everyone to continually pull their weight to the best of their ability.

If it’s to be...it’s up to me.

## **What Do We Get?**

As I mentioned, in order to put the shovel in the ground, we need \$1.5 million in pledges. What will that get us? Well, I am happy to tell you that it will get us more than originally planned.

The project is expected to cost \$7.5 million. That number has not changed. Originally, that \$7.5 million was going to get us a shell of a building...a fully-functional building...but basically a shell.

But things have improved. The numbers our General Contractor has given us are lower than the amount we budgeted. What does that mean? We'll have more than just a shell of a building. We will be able to add what the Building Committee calls "Furniture, Fixtures & Equipment"...meaning pews with kneelers, a new tabernacle and the like. We'll also be able to add the covered walkway you see in the picture above me, which will be a key addition. And if this pledge drive exceeds our goal of \$1.5 million, we stand to have the opportunity to add the Bell Tower and the Piazza, or gathering space out front.

It is happening. Through the hard work of many people, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit, things are really falling into place and going our way. We are going to build this church. And soon.

Let me answer two other questions that are probably on your mind. When will a shovel go in the ground? If all goes well, we break ground this Spring. That's roughly 6 months away. And when do we expect to be done? Construction should take 12 months, meaning our goal is to celebrate Easter 2009 in the new church. If it's to be...it's up to me.

So, again, at this point, \$1.5 million is absolutely necessary to get approval to put a shovel in the ground. Can we do it? We can, if enough parishioners understand that "If it's to be....it's up to me."

## **Why is this Important?**

Now, why is this important? Why don't we just keep the status quo? You know, if you are like me, you are kind of getting used to kneeling on the hard floor.

First, remember what I told you this parish will look like in 18 months. If you want a seat, you may have to go to the 7:00 am Sunday Mass, or the 3:00 Spanish Mass.

Second, remember that first church I mentioned we were building...the important one? What I called the Spiritual Church? This parish, since its inception, has been building the Spiritual Church with one hand tied behind its back.

We've been limited by space. We can't do the things we want to do...the things we need to do...because we don't have the proper space to do it. And the space that we do have? Each room could easily be double-booked on any given night.

Look around you. Look at this room. What is it designed for? Its true design is to bring people together...not for Mass...but for community. This space is needed for programs and events that bring us together...to help make us feel like part of the parish family...to help us hold events where we come to better understand our Catholic faith and what makes it special...and to allow us to become more actively involved in our parish, and in each others lives. This is the Msgr. Kerin Family Center. By completing the new Physical Church, we will be better able to build the Spiritual Church...the church that unites us...the church that brings us together for social and educational events...the church that helps us feel more like one community...one family.

But to do that, we need the Physical Church. And we need the pledges. So please pledge.

This is happening. We are building a church. We are "Building Our Future Together." Play as big a role in it as you can. If it's to be, it's up to me.

Thank you and God Bless.