

Church Renovation Proposal Background

Realizing the some may not have been able to make the picnic in June of 2014 or the other two parish gatherings we had in 2014, I have brought up to date the talk I gave at the parish picnic in June of 2014 concerning the possibility of renovating our Church.

When I came to St. Peter in 2005, we had water problems with the Church and especially the walkways. Fr. Joe had started working on this before I came, and soon after I came we finally found someone who was able to correct the problem, at least for a while, by sealing the roof again and putting vinyl as a ceiling to the walkways. A few years later we started to have water problems again impacting the Church.

In the fall of 2010 we started talking with some designers and contractors concerning the problems with the Church. The first was the water problem. We also talked about removing the popcorn ceiling in the Church, putting in new flooring and taking out the overhang above the altar. The overhang housed old speakers we no longer use. Removing it would give a sense of additional height to the sanctuary. We also considered an enlarged entrance as a transition from outside to the inside of the Church. This was both to provide a more hospitable place out of the weather before and after Mass and to allow for a decent sized interior transition space before entering the Church proper.

I began suffering from Myasthenia Gravis in 2007 and it was mostly a minor issue until January of 2011 when I had a severe case of it in my throat, which greatly affected my ability to speak and eat for about three months. Before I was able to receive treatment leading to a much better controlled situation with Myasthenia, Bishop Ricard resigned in March of 2011. Both of these situations put dealing with the Church on hold.

Bishop Parkes was ordained in June of 2012 and was here for Confirmation in April 2013. Those who have been here when the Bishop visits know that because he is very tall, he has a difficult time maneuvering in the sanctuary and has to duck even to get inside the Church. I was allowing him time to get somewhat settled in the diocese before I approached him about possible renovations to the Church. When he was here for Confirmation I said, "Bishop, if you let me do something with the Church, I'll make sure you can get into the building!" He gave me permission to continue to look into it further.

In the meantime we continued remedial work on the flat roof on the west side of the Church which we thought was the source of the leaks affecting the SW corner of the Church. The poorly supported roofs over the storage rooms would leak around the exposed electrical conduits on the roof which caused mold to develop in the outside storage rooms. We couldn't deal with the mold problem effectively until we are able to get the source of the leaks stopped. We thought we had it fixed until the hard freeze in January of 2014 which was followed by torrential rains, and we again had water intrusion. This time it was not only along the west wall, but under the stained glass windows and under all the doors.

We needed to find out the extent of what we were dealing with in the Church building. In the summer and fall of 2013 I had begun speaking with the diocese about engineers and architects they would recommend to help us with this project. After reviewing them I really didn't think,

based on past work, they would capture the direction I felt we should go in making modifications to the Church which would not only stop the leaks, but respond to issues with the Church such as the low ceiling, a modified entrance to allow for better transition space from outside to the Church proper which would also provide a more hospitable space before and after Mass during inclement weather.

The older I get the less I believe in coincidence and the more I see the providential hand of God. For example, when we were ready to do some interior and exterior work on the Church and roofs, I came down with a severe Myasthenia attack and process stopped for a time. In the interim we discovered more serious water intrusion problems.

In July of 2013 I came across a book by Duncan Stroik, *The Church Building as a Sacred Place: Beauty, Transcendence and the Eternal*. The author is a professor of Architecture at Notre Dame. It looked very interesting and I bought a copy of the book. It is an excellent book. He basically advocates that we need to move in the direction of restoring architectural principles in our Church buildings that have been part of the Catholic tradition for centuries.

I felt we should move in the direction the book spoke of when we did any kind of work in our Church. I showed the book to Bishop Parkes and he was in agreement. He also commented that we need to build our churches such that we don't have to renovate them every 30-40 years.

In the book, there is a chapter entitled: Building or Renovating the House of God: Advice to Pastors and Laity. I met with the Pastoral Council in November and we discussed the direction outlined by this chapter.

One of his suggestions was to make sure you have the right architect. It is more important to have the right architect to guide the project than to have an architect that is close by. Not satisfied with the past work of local architects the diocese has used, I emailed Duncan Stroik on December 12, 2013, about our possible project and asked if there was any architect in the SE part of the US who was schooled in his approach to restoring beauty, transcendence and the eternal to Catholic churches.

He told me that one of his best students is in Santa Rosa Beach, Braulio (Leo) Casas, and he urged me to contact him, which I did. He was very interested in helping us. There is also an additional architect who has recently graduated from Notre Dame who works for his firm, Philip Rhea.

Leo came to look over our Church and campus on December 27, 2013. He told me his approach is to preserve and make use of whatever is possible in existing structures until such time as it is not good stewardship in terms of finances, time and effort. We discussed a range of possibilities from renovating our present Church to remodeling the Parish Center into a Church to building new if neither of the first two possibilities was good stewardship in terms of feasibility.

At the Pastoral Council meeting in January of 2014 I told them the architect had visited and that we had permission from the Bishop to explore possibilities. The Pastoral Council agreed that we should pursue a proposal from the architect.

During the months of January and February of 2014 a proposal was created. I discussed the proposal with the Pastoral Council and the council was in favor of proceeding. I discussed the proposal with the Finance Committee and they agreed that we should spend up to the \$10,000 limit contained in the proposal. I signed the proposal in March of 2014 to engage the architectural firm to review our Church and Parish Center in terms of issues to be dealt with regarding our present Church.

A further analysis of the building was done and the architect sent us a report of his findings. The report listed six concerns and possible remedies:

- erosion of soil adjacent to structures,
- collection of ground water between Church and Parish Center with evidence of sidewalk damage due to settling, which may also affect the foundation of the Parish Center. We have since discovered that there may have been possible minor settling, but the problem with the tile coming up in front of the Parish Center main doors was due to poor bonding of the tile to the cement.
- flat roofs above covered walkways hold water and introduce moisture to adjacent structures,
- failure of the flat roof above the storage structure, allowing water to penetrate the storage area and the Church. We have since discovered that the water intrusion in the SW corner of the Church is due to failure of the underground drain for the downspout at the SW corner of the Church,
- the shingle roof on the Church shows excessive wear and pitting, and
- the HVAC system shows signs of moisture and mold.

We looked at the possibility that we might be able to raise the ceiling in our present Church and add an extension to the front to provide a more welcoming gathering space before entering the Church. After an **engineering review** it was determined that raising the ceiling would require removing or modifying the exterior roof system, in part or in whole, involving considerable amounts of structural calculations and labor intensive reconstruction. In addition, just raising the present roof and adding an extension for a gathering space would not address the issues of providing for Christmas and Easter visitors nor the difficulty of a large enough sanctuary area for appropriate liturgical services, especially funerals.

Given that any work we did in dealing with the concerns of the present building would be extensive, we asked the architect to begin designing a possible direction which dealt with the problems in the present Church while incorporating architectural principles that have been part of the Catholic tradition for centuries.

Paul Johansen and I met with the architect on May 8th of 2014. He presented us with some initial drawings. We were very pleased with the direction. It was almost like a Phoenix rising out of the ashes. These drawings were only "back of the napkin" drawings whose purpose was not to finalize the design of a proposed renovation, but simply to determine if the drawings were moving in the desired direction.

Two days later I showed the drawings to the Pastoral Council and they were pleased and excited about the direction. That evening I emailed the drawings to Bishop Parkes. The

following day he stopped by my office at the Pastoral Center. We talked briefly about the drawings. He asked if we were going to re-christen our Church, St. Peter Basilica. When he was leaving my office for a meeting he said, "I think it is beautiful and I would like to see it happen."

The Design Analysis for this project stated the objective as "renovating the existing Church in such a manner that recaptures some of the enduring architectural designs that have been part of the Catholic history for centuries."

Some concerns with our present building in meeting that objective are:

- our present Church does not express a sense of the sacred;
- there are engineering constraints and issues of cost effectiveness of modifying the existing roof trusses;
- the Church does not really express a sense of presence or entry. As an aside concerning this issue, there are times when guests have come to the office asking which building is our Church.
- a reduction in the width of the nave would reduce the number of seats.

Some of the remedies to the concerns that the initial floor plan provides are these.

- The plan redefines the nave to incorporate a new, taller roof structure;
- the addition of a narthex and bell tower would give the Church a sense of presence in the neighborhood and instill a sense of calling and entry. At the present time our main door entry is really like coming in the side door of the building.
- the plan allows for slight increase on seating. The present Church will seat 270 comfortably. The proposed plan will seat 300 comfortably. It also allows for an additional 140 to stand or sit in the much larger aisles and provides 12 seats for the cry room.
- the addition of an apse in the sanctuary will elevate the sense of the sacred and the focus on the liturgy.

We had a study done on the Church concerning the mold and humidity problem and it was this study that felt the water intrusion in the SW corner of the Church was due to the failure of the SW corner drain for the roof. We temporarily moved the downspout away from the Church and since that time we have had no more water intrusion, even during heavy rains.

With the source of the main water intrusion in the Church temporarily remedied we have installed two dehumidifiers in the Church. The optimal zone for indoor humidity is 30%-60%. We have set our dehumidifiers to 50% and since the installation of the dehumidifiers, the humidity level in the Church remains around 50% except for times when the doors are opened frequently for weekend services, but the dehumidifiers have done a good job in lowering the humidity rather quickly..

During the course of this journey, Fr. John Cayer, a friend of mine, suggested I watch a BBC series called Pilgrimage with Simon Reeve since many of the places Fr. John and I have visited

on vacations or pilgrimages were in this series.

In one session Simon was in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, one of the most magnificent churches built in its time. He told the story of a Russian Prince who was trying to decide whether to become Christian, Jewish or Muslim. He sent emissaries out to investigate and report back to him. One group entered Hagia Sophia and sent back the report that when they walked inside they felt like they had walked into heaven. Then Simon Reeve said, "Never underestimate the power of a building to generate intense feelings." That captured what I would like to see in our Church - a building which would generate a strong sense of the sacred.

We have two options - renovate existing Church and stay with structure, or move in direction of drawings. When I presented this to the parish at our picnic on June 20th of 2014 and again after all the masses on the weekend of June 28-29, the direction of the drawings was well received and there was an excitement about the possibilities contained in the drawings. The consensus was that we continue along this path and work toward a reasonable budget estimate and a timeline so we can make a decision about the future.

In order to reach a reasonable budget estimate we need to move from the "back of the napkin" drawing into a process that refines the direction more clearly, including the scale of the building and relationship between the components of the building.

We will continue to address concerns in our present Church in such a manner as to effectively deal with the concerns in the short turn in order to give us time to pray about and fully investigate a new direction concerning our Church.

Discerning the best path to take concerning the problems with our present Church will be a long process and is not something that we should jump into. It needs care study and reflection by all the members of our parish.

Most important is to accompany this process with prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I ask that all parishioners pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as we discern where God is calling us.

Fr. Paul White, Pastor

May 2015