

June 16, 2006

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

On a number of occasions I have mentioned in this space the work of our parish Buildings and Grounds Commission (B&G). This is a group I formed in January 2005 for the purpose of overseeing the care and management of parish properties and with a particular mandate to study the state and usage of parish properties, inviting the Commission members to make recommendations. This past Monday evening, B&G presented a detailed report to the Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council. I purposely absented myself from the meetings and discussions leading up to this report because I did not want its recommendations to be tagged as my own. Thus, the first time I saw the report or became aware of its contents was at the meeting of the Councils. The report is 80 pages long and represents a very serious piece of work by the five members of B&G. (A synopsis of that report is included as another insert in this week's bulletin.) Let me take this occasion to thank B&G for responding so generously with their time and efforts to the tasks I had set before them. I hope and trust that they will continue to serve the parish in helping me to understand and manage the physical plant of Holy Family.

The Space Management Plan submitted by B&G constitutes its recommendations to the Parish Staff and Councils (Pastoral and Finance). It is now the task of these three groups to consider and make decisions about B&G's recommendations. As you will see, some of these recommendations are of serious consequence and will be upsetting to parishioners. One thing we all need to keep in mind is that these are recommendations and no plan of action has yet been determined. I would also ask that you view these recommendations in terms of the needs and future of Holy Family Parish. While our history as Concord's Catholic people will certainly influence how we read this report, and rightly so, the real question is what will best serve the future of our parish and how our parish life will hand on the faith to the coming generations of Concord Catholics. I hope you will read the synopsis of the report provided in this week's bulletin, but in short the recommendations include these major points:

- a recommendation to reconfigure the rooms in the basement of Monument Hall to better serve Generations of Faith, the Confirmation program and Youth Ministry;
- a recommendation to decrease the number of pews in the basement chapel of the church, thus creating a large open assembly area in the basement for various uses;
- a recommendation to refurbish the pastor's suite at 70 Monument Square (rectory) and reconfiguration of the first floor and some second floor rooms for parish office space;
- a recommendation to lease or sell 55 Church Street (Parish Center);
- a recommendation to renovate Monument Hall with a functional code compliant kitchen and removal of the stage area to increase seating capacity;
- a recommendation to reconfigure the whole church basement as a large assembly area.

Please note that the six items above are *recommendations* from B&G and that no decisions have been made. Please also note that these recommendations, should they become action items, would require approval from the Archdiocese and, in some cases, approval and negotiations with the Town of Concord and the Historic District Commission. These recommendations serve well in providing a framework in which plans for the future of parish properties can be discussed and decisions made. Remember, too, that our current parish fiscal picture would allow for acting on only the simplest of the recommendations above in the near future.

As I noted above, I purposely absented myself from the meetings and discussions which led to the formulation of the B&G and report. The questions on the table here involve the long-term future of Holy Family Parish. Although I hope and plan to be with you for at least the next five years, I will not be here forever and the decisions made will need to be made and owned by parishioners. That does not mean that I will not, in my role as pastor, contribute to the discussion. I believe my position and work give me a particular perspective on these questions and I hope that the parish will benefit from that perspective. In short, here's what I'm thinking right now...

1) Whatever decisions are made, some parishioners will find them wise and some will find them unwise: that's the nature of proposed change. While I'm sure that some will be disappointed and upset simply on the basis of these *recommendations* having been made, I hope that we will all be able to enter into a discussion of these matters with a fair degree of objectivity and much charity towards those with whom we might find ourselves in disagreement.

2) The B&G report is largely based on objective, statistical foundations along with the valuable input from the surveyed parish ministry groups. The recommendations now need to be weighed by the Parish Staff and Parish Pastoral Council in terms of the pastoral impact on the parish community and its administration, and by the Parish Finance Council as it continues to review and plan the fiscal realities of parish life.

3) Unfortunately, the report and its recommendations may be read by some in terms of ideologies, camp mentalities and "their" agenda (depending on whom you believe "they" are!). Each of us is, of course, in some ways prejudiced by our own experience and other realities dear to our hearts and memories. I am confident, however, that the 5 members of B&G have made their best effort to put the needs and future of the parish above all else in preparing their report. Some of these have worked long years in both of our parishes of origin and they are individuals whose own work and expertise recommended them for the task I assigned them. My saying this should not necessarily be read as my endorsement of all their recommendations but certainly as my endorsement of the genuine and sincere service they have offered our parish.

4) I hope, pray, trust and believe that our parish will navigate the shoals of these waters successfully and ultimately for the benefit of all.

These issues are placed on the table just as the summer vacation time is ahead of us. In order to enhance communication, I have set up an e-mail address (**ParishBuildings@aol.com**) to which you can send your questions which I will forward, as appropriate, to B&G, the Parish Staff, the Parish Pastoral Council, and the Parish Finance Council. In addition to questions, substantive comments will also be much appreciated. If you are not online, you can mail you questions and comments to me at 55 Church Street, Concord, MA 01742. (Signed messages contribute to the discussion in a way that anonymous messages often fail to do.)

Although the Parish Council's summer recess was about to begin, it has scheduled an additional meeting, in light of the B&G report, for **Tuesday, June 27 at 7:00 in Monument Hall**. This meeting will provide an opportunity for parishioners to be heard and questions to be answered with regards to the recommendations for parish space management. Several copies of the 80 page report are available at the Parish Center for those who might be interested in looking at the larger study.

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming

*Some parishioners have asked for an opportunity for **Prayer Before the Blessed Sacrament on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, Friday, June 23, from 3:00 - 7:00 p.m.** They have asked for this additional time as an opportunity to pray for priests on the Sacred Heart's feast day. Please know that the chapel will be open during that time for adoration. **If you would like to pledge an hour of adoration, sign-up sheets for this purpose are at the church doors.***