

# ST. AGNES CONVENT UNDERGOES REFURBISHING

## Repairs, Renovations, Replacements:

All three of these things are happening at the St. Agnes convent, vacated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame in 2010 and then Sisters of the Divine Savior three or four years later.

Built in the early 1950s, the convent once housed up to as many as a dozen sisters at a time, most of whom were teachers at St. Agnes School. An aging, unoccupied structure can easily fall into decline without residents who would notice when things fail, break or fall into disrepair. Major weather-related damage two winters ago left the basement deep in water and the chapel flooded as well. A thorough analysis of the convent’s condition revealed a number of areas that needed repair and updating: flooring, painting, some windows, for example.

The Catholic Mutual Insurance company handled the cost of major items like the basement flooding, but volunteers have pitched in to fix up the rest of the building. Maintenance supervisor Ella Ostrowski patched all the nail holes in the walls on the first floor and did much of the touchup work afterwards. A crew of parish volunteers—Woody Knurr, Darlene Kocher, Mike and Mary McKee—painted the ceilings and did some touch-up work last week. They took down the old light fixtures and replaced them with new ones.

“They were so old,” Mary McKee said, “they could have been re-sold as antiques.” They were also in poor condition, one of them falling to pieces as it was being taken down. The floors were also in bad shape and were replaced throughout the first floor of the convent. The stairs to the second floor will be carpeted.

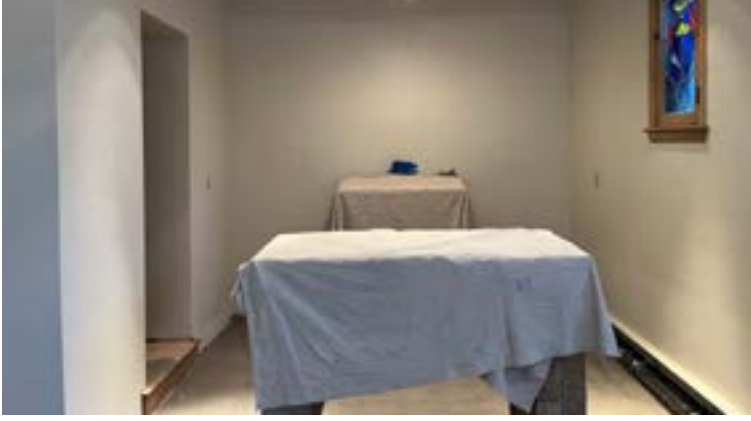
“The goal is to make the building into a conference and retreat center,” parishioner Roman Pikula said. “And we want to make the chapel into an Adoration Chapel.” The stained glass windows have been cleaned, water damage was repaired, and very shortly the wall sconces and tabernacle will be ready to be returned to the chapel.



St. Agnes convent today



First floor hallway



Altar (in front) and table for tabernacle (in back)

Sister Margaret Mary was one of the last Notre Dame sisters to leave the convent 12 years ago. She visited the former convent last week and observed that the altar has no relics.

“Every altar has an altar stone with one or more relics placed inside the stone, as the altar represents Christ,” Sister said. “I can get you some relics.” Roman is grateful for her offer. He is also researching a replacement tabernacle: one which is used specifically for adoration, called a “tabernacle-monstrance.” It is designed with a smaller opening that shows the Blessed Sacrament for Eucharistic adoration. (Click on this [link](#) to see 1-minute video of what this looks like.)

If the parish is able to convert the convent into a conference and retreat center, more work will need to be done. The convent has no air conditioning and is not handicapped-accessible; both of those concerns are on the back burner for the moment.

Eventually, the dozen or so second floor bedrooms can be used for overnight retreats and the kitchen can be used for meals. “What we will need is window treatments, kitchenware, a refrigerator, lamps, bedroom furniture and bedding,” Roman Pikula said. Telephones in the building will need to be connected to the parish phone system. Wi-fi and computer are a necessity. The bathrooms are tiled and in good condition. More needs will surface as the project makes headway and the parish moves closer to making this dream a reality.

Currently, several bedrooms upstairs still have materials and furnishing in storage from the Marian Center which closed its doors a couple of years ago. All the display furniture, supplies and assets were given to Roman and Paula Pikula who have, in turn, gifted it to St. Agnes as a resource and asset. Some of the supplies and furnishing may be able to be used, while other items may be sold to support the purchase of other necessities.

“We need to build a community interested in building a Kingdom of God here at St. Agnes,” Roman said. “We do know how the united community works and how to lead it, how to motivate it, how to help it grow, so it stays together. We have more than 5,000 years of examples.”

More volunteers will be needed in the coming months. Anyone interested in helping out should contact Ella at the St. Agnes Parish office.



Living room with new flooring



Window at back of chapel, at front of convent



Two of the windows on west side of the chapel



Undated photo of chapel altar



Undated photo of altar set up for Mass



Undated photos:  
(left) Baby Jesus in crib with poinsettia in chapel corner  
(right) Christmas decorations on chapel windows

Thank you to Sister Margaret Mary for the photos from the past.