

SAINT BERNARD'S CHURCH

3100 Hempstead Turnpike
Levittown NY 11756
(516) 731-4220

December 2016

Dear Parishioner,

I have to make a big decision as to how to deal with some major concerns with our parish buildings and parking lot and I'm writing to ask you to participate in a survey so I know if we're going in the right direction. This is not something I can decide on my own.

First, in addition to reading this letter, I invite you to check out a video that explains everything even more plainly. Just go to our parish website:

www.stbernardchurch.org and click on the video link. (You can also do the survey online instead of sending the postcard back.)

Now let me explain. When I first arrived at St. Bernard's the parish had raised \$1.2 million to replace the school roof, to renovate the parking lot --including lighting -- and make a number of other repairs. We used \$392,000 for the roof replacement and the second phase was to hire an engineering first to evaluate the parking lot and make recommendations for the future. Hundreds of parishioners came to the town meetings where the engineers proposed some rather radical and exciting possibilities not only for the parking lot but for the parish facilities. One of the biggest concerns in their evaluation was the church tower which has been a source of leaks and heat loss ever since it was built.

I spent lots of time meeting with the staff, Pastoral Council, trustees, Finance Council and the leaders of parish ministry groups. To my surprise two things were just about unanimous:

(a) Take the tower down and put a steeple on the church instead
and

(b) Build a bigger lobby at the front of the church

And naturally **(c) Redesigning and repairing the parking lot** is certainly on the "must be done" list.

So after listening to a lot of advice, I present to you a proposal for your input.. Initial cost studies indicate that this is doable but before I go ahead with a full feasibility study, all I need to know is if you like the ideas of this proposal. If the parish says, "yes", we'll continue. If "no", we'll need to come up with some other plan. So please read and send in your vote.

Father Ralph Sommer
Pastor

Project Timetable

- Engineering Study (March 2016)
- Town Meetings (September 2016)
- Consult with
 - Staff
 - Pastoral Council
 - Trustees
 - Finance Council
 (October 2016)
- Consult with Parish Leaders (October 2016)
- Mail Survey to Whole Parish**
- If YES**
- Financial feasibility study
- Permission from Diocese
- Raise Funds
- Hire Architect
- Hire contractor
- Get busy

Here is a “Photoshopped” version of what our new church configuration could look like. Obviously not drawn by an architect -- but it gets our imagination started.



The problems with the tower...

The interior walls of the tower are constructed of 20-foot long studs that are two feet apart. They are quite flexible -- though they are not supposed to be. Sheetrock was screwed to these studs. Water has gotten inside the walls and deteriorated the sheetrock and created an ongoing mold condition. To fix it, the entire exterior would need to be stripped off, new studs and reinforcements put in and then water-resistant cladding installed. This kind of repair would still need re-caulking in about 20 years.

See photos of the interior structure on the video which is on our website:

stbernardchurch.org

The Case for a Bigger Lobby

At each funeral we do, we look out at the family who is walking in with the casket and so many are still outside the church as we start the prayers. In bad weather handicapped parishioners cannot wait outside as their ride comes to pick them up without being adversely affected by the weather. People in the wedding procession are squeezed into the small lobby area -- not a great way to start that celebration. People who attend Mass on the weekend must go over to the rectory if they need any services such as Mass cards, baptismal certificates, new registrations, etc. A larger lobby that had an alcove for the parish receptionist could solve these and other problems. So many other churches have great welcoming gathering spaces -- ours could be much better.

The Case for a Steeple

If we take the tower down, we would still build a replacement room where the current “back room” is, so we don’t lose space. We also don’t lose heat as we currently do -- all the heat goes right up the tower. But what would identify us as the Catholic Church in Levittown? Certainly a more obvious sign and better entrance design would help. But so would a traditional steeple. It would especially be seen at night as it would be lit. Our old church had a steeple and this would connect us to our past.

The Case for Consolidation

The engineer’s report recommended that we move all parish offices from their current locations to the convent building. The sisters would continue to live there in a new wing and the priests would live upstairs in a separate wing. But when parishioners come for the services of our main office, religious education, parish social ministry, etc. all will be in one place. The engineers said that “retiring” the aging buildings (rectory and Clairvaux House) would also save over \$60,000 a year in building and maintenance expenses.

The Case for Demolition

Since we can move all the functions from the rectory and Clairvaux House to a central location in the convent building, we can take these aging buildings down instead of continually putting money into their repair and upkeep. This gives us the space we'd need to design a wonderful new entrance to the property with some parking closer to the church. It will allow a safer traffic flow and give us the space we'd need for the larger lobby and a nice plaza in front of the church. The engineers also recommended taking down the dilapidated house on Salem Lane and move the garage near that location -- with appropriate screening and landscaping. Again it gives us more parking spaces and a much better traffic flow.

The Case for Waiting for the Parking Lot

A few people had suggested that since we have \$600,000 from the last capital campaign, we should go ahead now and renovate the parking lot. Did you have your street paved and then a few months later a utility came by and tore it up to put in pipes? We don't want to fix the parking lot and then have it torn up in the course of the other construction. There is no question that we will use the funds already raised for the parking lot, but let's do things in the order that makes sense. This whole thing is quite an ambitious project so if we go ahead with it, we'll be doing things in phases. In any case the parking lot renovation will include a better pedestrian walk, better traffic control, much needed lighting and other amenities that will add to the aesthetics of our parish property.

The Case for Some Additional Space

After analyzing how much space we would need in the convent it would be beneficial to add some more useable space off the back of the building. We are currently suggesting to use the new space as living quarters for the sisters and with the right design plan this space could be repurposed for parish use in the decades ahead if the place no longer functions as a convent.



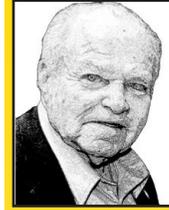
This proposal may raise more questions than answers for you at this time. We want to know all the questions and concerns and of course we need to figure out if we can afford the whole project or if we'd need to scale it back.

But before we spend any more time, money, and energy on this, we just need a quick indication if we're going in the right directions. So far most folks who have heard the proposal and seen the video have agreed that this is a wonderful and needed "master plan" for the future of our parish.

What do YOU think?

Please return the survey card or reply online.

From Council Members



I've been a parishioner for more than 60 years & have supported the successful campaigns both physically and financially. The proposed plans will be a great enhancement, Pray for another success.
--Ken Hall

Generations before us got us to where we are today. Now it's time to make



improvements for our children's generation. I want to leave them something better than we have today.
--Kerry Zorn



Just like our physical homes need to be renovated at times, so too our spiritual home. St. Bernard's is where we are fed the Word of God and it is time to enhance our church and grounds. The development of St. Bernard's campus will assist us in continuing to meet the needs of parishioners for generations to come.
-Steve Scarallo

From Council Members



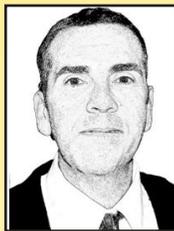
If we don't do something now, it's going to cost much more in the future. This plan makes sense.
--Kate Murray

I can't see throwing good money after bad in that tower. It's time to solve the problems once and for all. Plus a steeple would really say "church" to all who drive by.
-- Vinny Albrecht



My children are going to be part of this transition and I'm glad they will see the creative response to the current challenges. It's very exciting.
-- Erin Pinto

We're not a wealthy parish, but if many people participate, we could easily make this plan come true.
-- Al Matousek



Proposal Summary

- Take down the church tower
- Replace the church "back room"
- Add a traditional steeple
- Build a larger lobby
- Move the office functions and rectory residences to the convent building
- Add a wing at the rear of the convent for the sisters' residence
- Re-engineer and configure the convent building including new boilers, lighting, internet, etc. to support all the office functions
- Renovate the parking lot with new pedestrian walk, lighting, re-paving, new traffic controls
- Demolish old rectory and old Clairvaux House
- Demolish house on Salem Lane and move garage to near there
- Create better entrances to the parish both off of Hempstead Tpke. and Salem Ln.

If there is general parish support for this project, we will work with the diocese to do a feasibility study and then request approval of our project from the bishop and his advisors.

To have your voice heard

- Bring your reply card to Mass this weekend and put it in the collection basket (save on postage!!)
OR
- Go to our webpage and click on the vote link (save on postage!!)
www.stbernardchurch.org
OR
- Drop your card in the mail today

The proposed plan makes good economic sense by



eliminating those buildings that are and will continue to be liabilities to the parish's finances and enhance those buildings that will more efficiently serve the needs of our congregation now and in the future.

--Louise Cassano



Sometimes we have to look ahead to what is best for the future of our parish. The renovations will help to best serve all of us.

Sometimes it's hard to take the leap of faith but isn't that what it's all about?

I'm in!

--Phyllis Dalton

Being proud parishioners for the past sixty years, we've been



part of all the past campaigns. This major renovation will provide so many positive and vital improvements to our buildings and grounds and will result in a parish which can serve our faith community for many years to come. Count us in!

--Mary Ann Nuzzi (Trustee)
(And my husband Tony)