

2007 State of the Parish Address

Good Morning/Afternoon...I consider it a privilege to come before you today as your Parish Council Chair and it is my pleasure to report to you that the state of our Parish is sound. Financially, we finished our 2006 fiscal year in the black, we have operated under a balanced budget for the last four years, we have projected a balanced budget for fiscal year 2007 and we are debt free. As a parish we have done a great job in controlling expenses and increasing our giving to put us in this position. However, this does not mean that we do not have challenges ahead of us when it comes to finance. We continue to depend on interest money from our endowment fund to balance our budget. As we look to the future, we will have to do a better job of living within our current income stream if we want to save for unforeseen emergencies and provide for our future needs.

In addition to finances, our parish faces an array of other challenges. Many, if not all of these challenges are not unique to us, but are faced by others throughout the Dioceses and across the country. These include a shortage of Priests, Parish Directors and other Religious, an aging population, decreased attendance at Liturgy, a decrease in volunteerism, decreased financial support and a decrease in youth involvement in the church.

As a Parish, we have recognized these challenges and we have accepted the reality that they will drive inevitable change in our Church. Knowing this, we were faced with two choices, continue the status quo and wait for the future to come to us, or proactively plan for change and direct our own future to the extent possible. The choice, of course, was easy. The reality is that the planning, and implementation of those plans, will require considerable work and persistence, and above all faith.

Planning for our future required us to come together as a Parish to develop a Strategic Plan. This planning process was completed last year and resulted in the publication of our Pastoral Plan, which was shared with the Parish late last year. This plan sets our collective goals and objectives for the next 5 years. For those of you who are not familiar with the plan, I encourage you to review it on our Parish website, or to borrow a copy from our Parish office.

In general, the Pastoral Plan sets measurable goals for each of our Parish's standing committees. Some of these goals are fairly simple and are meant to maintain or enhance some of the many things that we currently do well as a community. Many of these are already visible and include increased scheduling of Children's Liturgy of the Word, passing of baskets at the offertory, implementation of the stewardship prayer into our Liturgy, continued identification of those in our parish family who are homebound or in nursing homes, the development of a Christian Formation Committee, family recommitment weekend, and beginning within the next month, the inclusion and education of our children in the stewardship of time, talent and treasure.

Other goals are more ambitious and will require greater effort and commitment from all of us. These include greater collaboration with the other south side and city Parishes and planning for the needs of our physical facilities.

In the area of collaboration, considerable time and effort has been spent over the last several years in an attempt to develop a city-wide plan for the six Parishes of the City of Sheboygan. Unfortunately, I must report that the successes of that effort have been limited. The idea of a citywide Director appears to be dead at the current time and the reality of any significant citywide collaboration in the short term does not look encouraging.

In a more positive sense, the idea of additional collaboration between the south side parishes appears more realistic at this time. The St. Peter Claver Council and the combined Council of IC/SSCM met earlier this month and although it is too early to report any tangible results, both Councils appear to agree that additional collaboration is necessary. Additional meetings are likely to take place and we welcome your input and ideas as this process continues.

As most of you are aware, we have a variety of challenges with our parish facilities. We have a school building that is outdated and not being used, we have an outdated and underutilized rectory and we lack handicapped accessibility in most of our facilities. As stated by our parishioners during our parish planning process, we are in need of an accessible parish gathering space, designed space for funeral visitations other than in the church, a more focal and functional baptismal font, a parish center, rooms for our various parish meetings and possible classroom space for religious education classes including grade school, high school and adult parishioners.

In an effort to evaluate our options, we retained an architect to study our facilities and to provide an opinion of the best way to meet these needs. The results of that study indicate that the most economical method of achieving our goals is by raising the existing school and rectory buildings and constructing a new facility. In addition to providing for the needs I just listed, a new facility would provide a covered drop off area to the church and reduced operating expenses due to energy efficiencies provided by new construction techniques and equipments as well as the elimination of many cubic feet of unused space. An ancillary benefit would be more parking in our existing lot and easier and safer access to our parking area and the surrounding streets.

All of this sounds very exciting, but of course, it comes with a price. The next step in this process requires permission from the Archdiocese to conduct a feasibility study. We have contacted the Archdiocese and we received approval earlier this week allowing us to proceed with that study. The feasibility study will result in more formalized plans and an estimate of the cost of construction. You as parishioners will of course be a part of that process and will have the opportunity to view the plans and to express your ideas and opinions.

After we have decided on a plan and receive an estimate of costs, we will enter into a capital fundraising campaign to see if we have the financial support necessary to proceed with the plans. Current Archdiocesan rules require that 100% of the construction estimate be available in pledges and that 50% of the construction estimate be in hand before construction is allowed to begin. It is not the intent of this Council or the leaders of this Community to burden this Parish with debt to achieve this building project. You have asked, through the strategic planning process, for an upgrade in our facilities. You will also decide, through your financial commitment, if this dream will become a reality.

It is important to remember, as I stated at the beginning of this talk, that we are financially stable, but that it is only through the use of interest income. If we are to embark on this project, the funds required must be in addition to the monies that we are now using to operate our ministries. This will require sacrifice on the part of every one of us.

We have a lot going for us here at St. Peter Claver. We have great Liturgies and that is the most important positive of all. We know that if we continue to excel in that regard, we will continue to have life as a parish. We also have a great tradition of music within our congregation. Even with the loss of our music minister, we continue to enthusiastically praise God in song even as we continue our search for a new director. Those of you who were present at our volunteer breakfast several weeks ago also realize that we have a great base of volunteers who keep this parish running. Each and every one of you is an important part of our family and makes us what we are. And last but not least, we can be proud of our welcoming nature and the fact that we continue to have a strong ethnic diversity. St. Peter Claver is truly a welcoming community to all.

The founders of this parish made great sacrifices almost 120 years ago to provide us with the facility and traditions that we share today. The generations of parishioners that followed added to those traditions as times changed and the needs of the Parish changed. It is now our turn to make the tough decisions required of us as we look to the future knowing that the needs of the church and the needs of our specific parish are changing. I ask you to please prayerfully consider this as you contemplate these plans in the weeks ahead. Without the faith, courage, sacrifice and foresight of those who founded St. Peter Claver, we would not be in existence today. I hope that we are all blessed with the wisdom to make the right decisions to assure that our descendants are blessed with the same opportunities and traditions that we share today.

Thank you for attentiveness. I will be available after mass, along with John Kittelson, one of our parish trustees, to answer any questions that you have at this time.

Thank you!