

News for the Pews

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As I have become increasingly involved in St. Mary's parish activities over the past few years, it has often surprised me that many parishioners are unaware of some of the developments and events occurring on a regular basis. As a result, I'm starting this little monthly newsletter to help everyone stay better informed and involved.

We at St. Mary's have long realized that we have been greatly blessed to have Father Hugh Assenmacher as our priest. His humor is very dry and he absolutely refuses to help us pick strawberries (due to certain memories of his youth), but one could hardly ask for a better priest. Thus, it is with great sadness that we're going to have to let him go. As you'll hear in the letter from Abbot Leonard, he's riding to the rescue of his brothers at Subiaco Abbey. He was the organist for the Abbey for decades, but his replacement, Br. Dominic Faciane, OSB is beginning his studies to become a priest, so Father Hugh is being recalled, effective August 1. He will be sorely missed. I'm sure the parish will be holding a farewell party for him before his departure.

We may combine that with a welcoming party for Father Pius Ajunwa Iwu, who'll be taking over as sacramental minister as of August 1. We have little background information about Father Pius at this point, but one has to believe we will also enjoy a great relationship with him.

The other big issue for the parish at this point is the HVAC system in the church. A failed sensor controlling heaters on water lines in the large chiller unit at the northeast corner of the church allowed those pipes to freeze and burst sometime early this spring. That essentially ruined it and the whole system, which is ultimately going to essentially require a whole new system.

Some elements are salvageable and can be reused. The copper pipes are still good, as is the electrical system supplying power to the various units. But the chiller, the boiler, the pumps, controls and modules will need to be replaced. The registers on the perimeter of the church will probably need to be replaced as well, since newer units will almost surely be more compact, as well as more efficient. The insulation on the pipes will need to be replaced.

The building committee and our resident HVAC expert Jim Rofkahr also believe it's time to address some nagging issues that plagued the old system, such as water from the chiller having to flow through the boiler, as well as condensation problems. That's going to boost the already very large price tag for the new system.

The parish is working with a highly recommended engineering firm HSA Engineering and an assigned engineer Scott Archer, to design the new system to meet our various needs. They'll be making recommendations for it in the near future, then we can move forward. We'll lay the groundwork (figuratively) for getting the job done, then proceed sometime in late summer or fall. The tentative goal for the completed project is October or November, when having the boiler operational could become the more pressing issue.

The parish council is looking at having a dedicated fundraiser for the new system at some point. If you have any ideas or are willing to help, please let Deacon Brian, me or any other member of the parish council or committees know. All help will be greatly appreciated.

In the interim, the church needs air conditioning this summer. The easiest thing to do would be to close up the church and hold mass in Lawrence Hall as was done during the big renovation around the turn of the century. However, it's not just the people who need to be cool and dry. The church itself, with the fabric now covering the walls needs to stay dry. The problems with the paint, plaster and speaker that fell off the wall next to the Blessed Mother's altar last year exemplified what might happen if the moisture and humidity in the church aren't controlled. The organ is also sensitive to heat and humidity. So, closing the church isn't really an option.

The first potential temporary solution for cooling the church would be to rent a large central air unit similar to those that cool most houses. It would be placed outside the south door to the church. The door would be removed and replaced with a temporary door that would accommodate a large duct coming into the building and supply the cooler air. But it would also require replacing the door to the bell tower with a similarly temporary door accommodating a return air duct that would run back to the cooling unit. Not only would this require considerable work and likely be pretty unsightly, it was the more expensive of the two temporary options available. As such it was rejected pretty quickly.

The second option was to bring in a temporary chiller similar to the old unit, with temporary lines connecting it to the existing distribution system. It will probably be on a large skid or trailer and placed at the east end of the church. Be aware that the existing door to the church basement is badly rotted at the bottom and will soon need to be replaced. Thus, cutting off the bottom few inches in order to make room for a box through which the temporary lines run from the chiller to the existing system shouldn't be an issue. This also has the added advantage of not interfering with the preliminary work on the new system when that project is getting under way. And, as implied above, this method is the cheaper of the two alternatives. When set-up and removal fees are included, it will cost the parish about \$2,500 per month, assuming a four-month window. The cost per month will drop if the installation period for the new system is dragged out.

The failure of the church HVAC system postponed the proposed addition to the Lawrence Hall kitchen. I plan to pass along information about that project in a forthcoming newsletter.

Other projects are going forward. The parish will soon buy a nice new set of playground equipment from Sam's Club, with hopes the Knights of Columbus can lead a workday dedicated to assembling it. The St. Joseph Society is looking at holding a workday to spread sand around the big set of swings and build a small concrete retaining wall around the north end of the culvert at the west end of the back Lawrence Hall parking lot. The quilters have a new toy and the Bible study group is poring over St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. All are welcome to join.

We're probably going to have another meet-n-greet in early July and we'll talk about some of the things going on. Thanks for your time and attention,

Daniel "Danny" Vaught