

Executive Summary of Architecture and Building Commission Workshops and the Identification of Parish Needs and Preferences

St. Edward the Confessor Catholic Church was established in the rapidly growing suburban community of Clifton Park by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Albany, New York in 1967. The church was built and dedicated in 1969. The parish has had two subsequent additions to the church since it opened. The first addition increased seating from 650 to 1,000, and the second added new offices, a social hall and enlarged the gathering space.

In the spring of 2007, the Building and Grounds Committee, with the approval of the Finance and Administration Committee, conducted a parish-wide survey of needs. A number of pressing needs were identified as well as some needs that, while not pressing, were seen as critically important to the life of the parish. The pressing needs centered on our Faith Formation Program. When the parish began forty-three years ago, the classroom space that was built was meant to accommodate 400-600 students. Today there are over 1,500 students in the program. With the newly instituted Youth Ministry Program, it became very clear that there is inadequate space available for the youth of our parish to gather for their social, recreational and spiritual needs. In addition, the majority of those who returned surveys indicated that they would like to see some improvements made to the liturgical environment. These concerns centered primarily on the lack of a sacred or spiritually inspiring environment in the liturgical space, the insufficient size of the gathering area, the lack of a central entrance into the church and the lack of adequate space for the growing faith formation program.

Discussions with the many groups and committees active in the church community supported these concerns and identified others. Based on this information, Father Butler contacted the Architecture and Building Commission (the ABC) of the Albany Catholic Diocese to discuss the process to fully identify and address the needs of the parish.

The ABC recommended a committee of up to eleven people be established to coordinate a new facility master planning process. The committee was formed and three workshops were organized in October and November 2009. The workshops were designed to identify the needs and preferences of the church community, both in the near and long term. Members of the leadership groups of the parish, including the Pastoral Council, the Finance and Administration Committee, the Building and Grounds Committee, the Social Committee, the Music Ministry, the Faith Formation ministry, and the Knights of Columbus, were invited to participate in these workshops. Approximately forty parishioners representing these groups participated in one or more of the workshops.

Reverend Richard S. Vosko and Professor Walter Kroner (architect), members of the ABC, gave presentations at each of the workshops for the groups to consider in their discussion of needs and preferences. The topics presented were:

1. The History of Christian Places of Worship
2. What Does a Catholic Church Look Like
3. Designing Buildings and Places That Says "We care."

Workshop participants broke into small groups to discuss the information and came up with specific needs and preferences.

Summary of Parish Needs and Preferences

The results of these group discussions are provided as part of this report and are presented exactly as recorded by the facilitators of each group. The following are the principal areas of improvement identified:

- The Saint Edward's facility needs to reflect the various functions of the church community and should foster a sense of communal gathering.
- It is difficult for people new to Saint Edward's to find the main entrance to the church, we need to provide a simpler main entrance to the church.
- Improve the worship space to facilitate greater involvement of the church community in the liturgy.
- Increase the "sacred" feeling in the church. It does not "feel" like a church, it's too "cold".
- Increase faith formation space to address the number of students currently and projected to be in this program. The program currently has 1,400 students utilizing spaces that were originally built for approximately 600 students.
- Locate choir and musicians within the worship space in order to encourage greater participation by the church community.
- Improve the lighting, sound and environment (heating, cooling and ventilation) in the worship space.
- Provide a space for the tabernacle that is visible and accessible to parishioners.
- Increase the size of the gathering area and include amenities such as seating for the elderly and refreshments after mass. This space should provide a passage from outside into the worship space And be accessible to additional activities
- Provide handicapped accessible spaces throughout the facility, including seating within the worship space, bathrooms, and devices to assist the hearing impaired.
- Provide a more conducive community atmosphere for our youth and teens. Create a program and facility to attract and retain our youth and keep them engaged.
- Provide space for the youth ministry program.
- Incorporate more technology throughout the facility.
- Upgrade the kitchen and equipment to support church activities (i.e. Knights of Columbus breakfasts and dinners). The kitchen should be accessible to the gathering space.
- Provide an outdoor spiritual space, such as a prayer garden.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The workshops have identified the most important needs of the parish as expressed by the parishioners who represented the leadership groups of the parish. In conclusion, the workshop participants believe that the needs are real and necessary and that the master planning process should proceed.

The next step in the facility master planning process, as outlined by the ABC, is to develop a scope of work and Request for Proposal for professional architectural services. The Master Planning Committee will initiate these actions during the first half of 2010.

The Committee will provide communication throughout this process to the parish community and provide parishioners with ample opportunity for input.