

August 19, 2007

Pastor's Column

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Pastor's Update on Our Parish Build Out

Last week, I had a conversation with Joel King, the Director of Construction Services for the Diocese of San Diego.

The result of the conversation was that St. Thomas More Parish will be on the agenda of the December 2007 meeting of the Construction Services Committee.

It will be at this meeting that all of our plans will be reviewed (The approval of the Conformance Review of our Conditional Use Permit, "CUP"), and our Capital Campaign progress.

With a successful review, we then would have approval to hire an architect, hire a liturgical consultant, and begin the process of construction.

In the last two and a half years, we have made significant progress:

1. We began "Our Journey Into The Future . . . Together" Capital Campaign with Bill Ipsen as our Chairperson. This Campaign is being directed "in-house" by Chris Smith, our Director of Stewardship and Development, with the technical help of other Parish Staff. To date we have \$5.7 million in pledges, and \$2.2 million on hand in the Parish Savings, Deposit & Loan Trust (PSDL Trust) at the Diocese.
2. We purchased the five acre parcel of land contiguous to our Parish Campus for \$589,000 and now own it "free and clear."
3. We are paying down our Parish debt \$11,000 a month. Our original debt was \$795,000. Our debt to the PSDL Trust is now at \$575,000. Our last payment will be in December 2011.
4. We are beginning to address our pledge to the Secondary Education Initiative for a new High School in North County. Our Parish pledge is

\$1 million. Presently we have paid \$88,000 toward that pledge.

5. We formed a New Construction Committee with Brian Leahey as the Chairperson. This committee is ready to go as soon as we are ready to go.
6. We formed the Interior Design Team with Phil & Pat Goscienski as its Co-chairpersons. This Committee has been meeting for over a year, has interviewed prospective Liturgical Consultants, and is ready to select and hire one of them, once we are ready to move forward.
7. Within the next few weeks, our property will be "staked" out by Brian Leahey in order to indicate to all Parishioners exactly where the Church will be located, as well as its size. It will be exciting to begin visualizing our Church!
8. We continue to move forward as the Diocese moves through its Chapter 11 Reorganization process.

We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go!

At this point we are anticipating that the Church with its Daily Mass Chapel and its Memorial Gardens will cost \$8.5 million.

The Parish Office and Administrative Center will cost \$1.5 million.

In order to secure a loan from the PSDL Trust, certain requirements must be met:

- A. "The Parish must have on deposit in the PSDL Trust one-third of the approved cost of the project for which the loan is sought."
- B. "Indebtedness will not jeopardize pastoral

and financial responsibilities, such as:

- ♦ salaries and benefits
- ♦ utilities and maintenance
- ♦ program expenses
- ♦ diocesan assessments
- ♦ participation in special collections.”

- C. “Normally, there will not be approval for a loan repayment plan which provides for annual debt service (principal and interest) from the Parish which would exceed 25% of the ordinary income of the Parish for the prior year as reflected on its financial statement.”
- D. “The amortization period of the debt service will be dictated by the size of the loan and the ordinary income of the Parish...a loan for \$500,000 or more must be repaid within a reasonable period of time. In no case will a loan amortization period exceed 25 years.”

Keeping the “one-third rule” in mind:

1. If we were to build just our Church without the Daily Mass Chapel, Memorial Gardens, and the Parish Office/Administrative Center, the cost would be around \$7 million. We would need \$2.3 million on deposit. We are now close to that amount.
2. If we were to build our Church including the Daily Mass Chapel and Memorial Gardens, and hold off on the Parish Office/Administrative Center to a later date, the cost would be \$8.5 million. We would need \$2.83 million on deposit.
3. If we were to build our Church including the Daily Mass Chapel and Memorial Gardens and the Parish Office/Administrative Center all at the same time, the cost would be \$10 million. We would need \$3.3 million on deposit.

In the coming months as we ready ourselves for the December meeting, I will seek the advice of the Development Council, Finance Council, and the Pastoral Council in regard to what would be the most prudent and cost effective build-out plan for us—piecemeal or, waiting a bit longer, do the entire build-out at the same time.

However one looks at it, we are coming close to what we need on deposit—\$2.3 million, \$2.8 million or \$3.3 million.

The crucial issue is that Parishioners need to continue to fulfill their pledges and continue to donate to the Capital Campaign.

Recently, a few parishioners have made a decision to hold back on their Capital Campaign pledges due to the Diocese’s Chapter 11 Reorganization. They have informed me that they will continue to fulfill their pledges, but deposit the money in their own accounts. When the Diocesan Chapter 11 Reorganization is resolved, they will then give the money to our Capital Campaign.

While their intentions may be good, although based on fear, these actions will only hurt our Parish and will stymie our build out. When we go before the Construction Services Committee in December 2007, they will be reviewing the amount of money we have on deposit in the PSDL Trust. They will not be willing to consider the money that is also “out there” in parishioners’ own personal accounts.

As I said earlier this year, in my Pastor’s Column of May 20, 2007, *“Several people have indicated that they are thinking about suspending their payments to the Capital Campaign, in the fear that this money will be lost in a Diocesan settlement. If we are not careful, we can create a panic here in our Parish...In the end, we could do to ourselves what we fear some of the victims and their lawyers are trying to do. We will be burning our own house down!”*

I once again encourage everyone to continue to move forward in faith, to allow business as usual to happen, so that we will have the necessary money on hand in the PSDL Trust, in order to receive a favorable decision from the Construction Services Committee.

Each Parish Household is crucial. The decision you make today will affect our Parish for years to come. The Parish Build Out is in your hands!

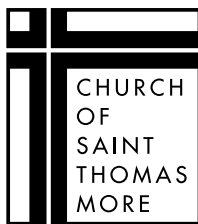
Know that I am grateful and very appreciative of the generosity that is found in this Parish. We have come a long way due to it, and we still have a long way to go.

Don’t let fear rule your hearts now!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. Mike

Rev. Michael Ratajczak
Pastor



May 20, 2007

Pastor's Column

Rev. Michael Ratajczak • michaelr@stmoside.org • 758-4100 x100

The Diocese of San Diego, Chapter 11 and Reorganization, and St. Thomas More Parish

As our Diocese winds its way through Chapter 11 and reorganization, I am sure that many of us are reading the articles that have been appearing in the San Diego Union Tribune.

I would hope that as we read those articles, we are also reading what Bishop Brom has been communicating to us in the past several months. There have been three major pieces he has written. All of these have been included in our bulletin at the time of the issuance of his statements.

If for some reason, you may have missed his communications, you can pick up a copy of all his statements at the Parish Office or at the Information Table on the Plaza after any weekend Mass.

The present situation in our Diocese has a long history, as does the situation in every Diocese across the United States. It is not my desire in this piece to review that history and to comment on the strong positions that people have taken on both sides of the issue over the years.

I simply want to address an issue that could have a direct effect on us here at St. Thomas More. I share my views with you in an attempt to help you in your decision-making.

First and foremost, we continue to pray for all victims of sexual abuse by priests. We pray for them, and we pray for their families. The victims deserve a just settlement, with the understanding that a financial settlement is only a part of the overall healing process.

In my opinion, though, there are those victims along with their lawyers who seem to not only want a fair settlement, but they are desiring and willing to “burn the house down” in the process.

Bishop Brom is seeking to not only provide a fair settlement to those who have been hurt, but he is also seeking to ensure that the mission of the Church in this Diocese will continue, and not be totally stymied because of the settlement of these lawsuits.

In the Chapter 11, Reorganization Process, this is what Bishop Brom is attempting to do. It is the best process to ensure fairness to the victims and to us, the Church, as we move forward in continuing the mission of Jesus.

It is my personal opinion, as I read the articles that have been appearing in the San Diego Union Tribune and the North County Times, that the Diocese is faring well as we move through the process of Reorganization. As the Judge continues to better understand the “Byzantine”

accounting system of the Diocese, she will find nothing illegal or immoral; and this situation is going to provide an opportunity for the Diocese to move even more rapidly into better business and accounting practices.

We are holding our own, and I believe that in the end, the Bishop's desire to provide equitable settlement to the victims and to ensure the future viability of our Diocese will in fact happen because of this Chapter 11 procedure.

In the meantime, what do we do on the local level, here at St. Thomas More? I have begun to hear from several people that they are thinking about cutting back on their donations in the fear that this money would be lost in an eventual Diocesan Settlement. What effect will this thinking have on us here at St. Thomas More?

Let me use the Annual Catholic Appeal as an example. All of these funds are designated funds and can only be used for the purpose for which they are intended. Our Parish assessment is \$30,000. This money goes to help provide for the many services that our Parish receives from the Diocese. Any money that we receive over and above our \$30,000 assessment is returned to the Parish for our use. This money is directed toward our Operating Budget.

This year we are \$6,000 under what we collected in last year's ACA. This is due, I believe, to people's fear about the Diocesan Chapter 11 process. But who is being hurt by this? We are. We have made our assessment. The Diocese will receive its \$30,000 but we are \$6,000 under the amount of overage that we collected last year, and in the end this will hurt us in our Operating Budget. So, if anyone is saying, "I am not giving to the ACA because I don't want the Diocese to receive this money", you are mistaken. The Diocese is receiving its assessment. The only entity that is being hurt is us, St. Thomas More Parish. We are receiving less money because of people's choices to not give to this Diocesan Collection.

Several people have indicated that they are thinking about suspending their payments to the Capital Campaign, again, in the fear that this money will be lost in a Diocesan settlement. If

we are not careful, we can create a panic here in our Parish in which people will not only suspend payments to the Capital Campaign, but also to the Operating Budget. Where will this leave us with our ministries and parish activities? Will we have to lay off staff and suspend programs, because of a lack of funds?

In the end, we could do to ourselves what we fear some of the victims and their lawyers are trying to do. We will be burning our own house down!

I am a tithing parishioner, and I am continuing with all my pledges and payments. It is business as usual.

Think about it. When airline went through Chapter 11 and reorganization, it kept flying. It was business as usual.

This is what I am encouraging all of us to do. Let's keep flying. Business as usual. I believe that God's hand is in the mix of all of this, and the end result will be fair, and it will be healing for the victims of abuse and for our Diocese.

I ask you to help keep us flying. Let it be business as usual. And in the meantime, pray, pray hard, and pray every day, knowing that God is with us, and that God's hand will ensure that whatever the results, it will ultimately be the best for the Church.

This is a time of purification and healing for the Church. There is no way of getting around it. It is painful, it hurts, it is embarrassing in the least, for all Catholics, and for all the priests presently in active ministry.

I pray that you will join me, here at our local level, to trust in God, to continue to move forward, to allow business as usual, in order to ensure that the mission and ministry of Jesus continues for this time and this place.

Thank you!

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Fr. Mike".

Rev. Michael Ratajczak,
Pastor