

This Coming Year

This coming year promises to be an eventful year for our parish. Last week we were updated on the progress of our Parish Connection Project, and we took a virtual tour that enabled us to see what can be: (1) new space that benefits all, (2) better traffic flow, (3) handicap accessibility, and more. But we are doing more than building a building; we are building a community.

Challenging Days: To be sure, we already have a community of faith at Saint Mary's Community, but these are challenging days as we try to live our faith in a society that is increasingly secular and hostile to faith. In response to this new reality, the Archdiocese has gone through a difficult and painful process of restructuring, and next week we will play a video in which the Archbishop will speak about (1) the restructuring that taken place and (2) the next steps for renewing and revitalizing our faith.

Need for a Deeper Faith The reality is we are living at time that requires us to deepen and revitalize our faith so that we can live our faith more fully and proclaim it to a new generation. The restructuring we have done is the beginning not the end of the process. It was necessary, but it does not address the deeper issue of faith: how shall we live our faith in secular age that has less and less tolerance for faith?

Faith on Fire: I have been concerned about this challenge for some time, and I would like to address it in the coming year. And so, as we build a building, I want to make sure we are also strengthening and committing ourselves anew to our faith so that we can build a community whose faith is on fire. Last week, at the 9:30 AM Mass, I announced the theme that will guide my vision for the year ahead: "Faith on Fire." By "Faith on Fire," I mean (1) faith that believes what it professes, (2) proclaims what it believes, and (3) puts into action what it proclaims.

Two Kinds of Faith: (1) When faith is only part of our life, in a corner of our life, something we celebrate occasionally, it is on life support. It may not be dead, but the death watch has begun. Such faith does not transform lives; it does not give hope because it is only a part of life. (2) But when faith is at the center of our life,

it is on fire; it changes everything because it transforms the whole of life. When faith is on fire, the whole of our life is on fire for Jesus Christ. And when the whole of our life is on fire for Jesus Christ, our lives are changed and transformed.

A Way Forward: How can we make our faith a faith that is on fire? (1) We need to *begin with ourselves* by deepening our prayer life and commitment to the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to worship as a community of faith with renewed fervor and devotion. These are issues I will address in the weeks ahead in my weekly bulletin columns and homilies. (2) But we need to do, something else that we have not done. We need to *come together for a moment of parish renewal*. To accomplish this, I have engaged an outside team of missionaries to guide us in a Parish Mission that will take place at the beginning of Lent, Saturday, *March 3 and continuing through Wednesday March 7*. I would like to fill the church on those days so that we can stir the flame of our faith in our parish into a burning and consuming fire. In the weeks ahead, I will be speaking about prayer and faith, and will be reminding you again and again of this parish mission. *Today I am asking you to put those dates in your calendar today: March 3-7.*

Building a Community: We are building a building, and when it is finished it will help us in our mission. But as we build our building, we must build a community of faith on fire. I hope you will accept the challenge and be part of our parish mission and revitalization. I hope that your faith will be at the center of your life, a faith that is on fire!