

SPG#129, Easter 4C

April 29, 2007 – Fr. Charles Pope

Acts 9:36-43

Revelation 7:9-17

John 10:22-30

Last Monday evening some members of the Building Committee and myself met in downtown Des Moines with the architect, Mr. Bill Wedeking, who was here for the Annual Meeting. For about two hours we went over all the spaces that we have discussed in our larger discussion on physical modifications: the possibility of a new kitchen, re-configured space around the Common Room and St. Dunstan's, and more. When I left the meeting I had the sense that we had taken a step forward. Bill Wedeking will join us on May 20 for a congregational meeting here at St. Paul's after church. By then he will have produced some more detailed drawings, coming out of our discussion last Monday.

For those who have been involved in the physical modifications discussion, I am sure you would agree that getting one's thinking around desired changes/additions in different spaces and the cost of such changes is a formidable challenge. And yet it is before us to engage in such thinking. To be sure, this thinking is not just about building materials and physical changes. For all of us who are part of the faithful here, the physical plant is soaked in the spirituality of many persons, past and present. Where we have our Adult Education and Survival Kits in St. Dunstan's used to be the worship space. At one time the worship space included the Common Room.

At the same time, we are also considering the future, and how the church might, in our physical space, provide for anticipated ministries. And with that we are thinking about traffic patterns and how we as people move from one part of our church to another. And so all the considerations taken together describe a dynamic that is hard to capture, hard to envelop, hard to describe. And yet, in these discussions, this church is meeting the challenge. We are beginning to get our thinking and our hearts around the larger picture.

Is it any wonder that a church with less energy, less hope, and less anticipation would not even dream of tackling such a task?

We could say, “Well, St. Paul’s moved the Chester Church onto this site. So, we should not have any trouble with a few physical modifications.” But, as that endeavor was unique, our current discussion is also unique. As one looks across all of our physical spaces, they are all soaked with the investments of many hearts and much faith. They are soaked with the prayers, the worship, the conversations, the conflict, the love, and the service of many souls past and present. And so it is no small matter to consider changing such space.

From one perspective it would seem that we just need to be good at business. We need to be good at looking at how our space has been used in the past, how it is used now, and how we anticipate using it in the future. And so a good business sense of options and possibilities would seem essential. A good business sense of cost and funds available would seem essential.

A good business sense indicates that we need to consult with an architect. But, as I sat there Monday evening with some members of the Building Committee, I thought back to the other meetings we have had on physical modifications.

And I realized that all of the people involved in those discussions were people who also worshipped together. In a worship service those people sing together, pray together, listen together. Over the course of time they work together in many and varied ministries. In so doing they use this space for worship, for socializing, for meeting, for planning. Via the AA program our space enables those who would reach out to others with substance abuse problems. Via the counseling that is done here, we reach out to those who suffer from all kinds of abuse, to those with marital problems, depression, and more. Our space enables education programs for different age groups. Our space enables student ministry.

And so when we consider physical modifications at St. Paul's, it is no small matter. And for sure it is not just business decisions. Because what we do here in these walls is loving and serving in the name of Christ, it is sacred. Because of our loving and serving in Christ this space is sacred. And so you can see how another community might turn away from such a monumental endeavor as being too big to take on.

Who are we? Who are we who discuss physical modifications, who worship, who love and serve together? And how did we get to this point? I like to think that we inherited a sacred trust from those who have gone before us here, from others who loved and served and deliberated. I like to think that we have all responded to a sacred call to be with each other and to do the work that we are doing. A sacred heritage and a sacred call.

I think it is no coincidence that we are here with these people in these times. I think that we are all drawn to this ministry, to this place, to these times. This togetherness that is specifically required when we talk of physical modifications is our heritage as followers of Jesus Christ. In today's gospel Jesus, the Good Shepherd says, **My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one will snatch them out of my hand.**

Our following is what binds us together. In a discussion on physical modifications what we do together is of paramount importance.

But you know what is funny. Everyone here seems to know that. And, believe me, in other settings, I have been part of some church discussions where that was not known.

As we stand in the doorway of physical modifications, of increased giving to fund those modifications, and all the other ministries in which we are involved, my heart is glad that we have responded to the sacred call to be together, to be the church. My heart is glad that we have said yes to the sacred heritage that is ours in this church called St. Paul's.

And my heart is glad that we are willing to do the immense and sacred work that we are doing. Sacred heritage, sacred calling, sacred work, sacred people. Amen.

