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10 March 2024 + Fourth Sunday in Lent

Since our open meeting on Thursday, February 22, I have been spending a good deal of time digesting what we might do to proceed with our capital projects. For those of you who were there, you all got the “sticker shock” when our projects that looked at first to run about \$1.5 million came to just over \$3 million! I presented the construction budgets to both our diocesan finance office and to Fr. Dhein, Vicar General and representative of Bishop Callahan. Fr. Dhein agreed that both projects were in need of doing and that they were well designed, but he referred to the diocesan loan policy which is that capital improvement projects need to have 80% cash on hand and 20% pledged for the loan to be granted. Exceptions are given, but not the amount that we would need. He told me he would support one or the other projects, but not both. He did say that if we could get our projects near to \$2 million, he would reconsider the percentage.

Talking with some of our finance council members, we agreed that we have to find some way to get both projects done, as both are critical to our parish. An obvious change in plans is to eliminate a new elevator for St. Joseph church and the necessary addition required to install it. That would mean living with the current lift. That, in itself, would like reduce the budget by \$1 million. The contractors said we could eliminate the street level entrance and dual stairs. I am really against that idea because if we simply put new stairs back as they currently are, that would eliminate any further possibility of better entrances to a church that has stairways everywhere.

The next meeting with our contractors is Monday, March 25. In the meantime, they will be working on alternatives for both projects to get them in a range that will be acceptable to the diocesan finance council. That, however, is only half the solution. We still need to cover the remainder of the projects through pledges to pay back the loan. I have some ideas regarding that, but will need to meet with the parish finance council to decide on the best plan to do this. As I mentioned to those present at our February 22 meeting, I spent my entire priesthood as a pastor getting parishes out of debt. I have no intention of finishing my pastoral work by putting a parish into a debt that cannot be paid.

Join me in praying to St. Joseph, patron of builders, and all of our patron saints to help us resolve these obstacles quickly, so that we can continue on schedule to begin this spring-summer. I will keep you updated on our progress and plans.

Blessings and best wishes,