

Tri Parish Rectory Announcement, December 2020

Many of you know that I grew up in the Catholic Point community, the youngest of 10 children in a hard-working dairy farm family. I remember a time many years ago when our home parish of St. Joseph was faced with a tough decision which could positively impact our ability to grow to better serve our parishioners. The old parish hall where all the parish gatherings such as wedding receptions and spaghetti dinners were served was inadequate. No air conditioning, cramped space in the kitchen and severely limited gathering space. Some of you may remember that old hall. The parish council came up with a plan to expand the hall to meet all the current and future needs. It was going to cost money though – a lot of money. I watched as my uncle James Malik laid out the plan to the parishioners and explained that with some additional spaghetti dinners each year in the Spring, the parish could responsibly handle the debt. The new hall more than tripled the number of people who could gather there comfortably. The debt was paid off in record time and that space has been enjoyed by so many parishioners and family members throughout the past 30 years. But at the time of the decision, there was concern – some parishioners were frightened by the prospect of taking on debt; not everyone felt the space was needed and that we could just make due. Some were resistant to any change. But the majority knew we needed the space.

Now today, here I am. I've been given the great honor of pastoring these three churches, each with long, rich histories of serving the Catholic communities of rural Arkansas. This honor is humbling and important and taken very seriously.

As many of you know, there has been quite a bit of discussion about the rectory. The rectory has been a part of the St. Boniface campus for generations and it also likely reminds many of you of our beloved Fr. Richard. However, the structure itself has serious problems.

Before I arrived, when Fr. Phillip was here as temporary administrator, there was a request by the Pastoral Councils for a professional evaluation of the rectory structure by the firm Morris Architects, Environmental Consultants. The study identified multiple serious problems including water damage and drainage issues, mold, structural issues with the foundation, asbestos and significant cigarette smoke damage. The conclusion of the study was given to all three Pastoral and Finance councils and the consensus of these councils after reviewing the study is to build a new rectory. Bishop Taylor reviewed the Pastoral and Finance councils input from the surveys they submitted and he has consulted with his staff at the diocese and the diocesan staff agrees as well that a new rectory needs to be built. Bishop Taylor has granted us permission to build a new rectory.

While it would be far easier and convenient for me to just move into a rectory rather than take on the challenge of building a new one, I can't. For my own health and safety, as well as the health and safety of future resident priests, the bishop and diocese recognizes that it would be irresponsible to

ask anyone, including myself, to live in an environment and be exposed to asbestos, mold and nicotine damage.

Although I know not everyone agrees with this change, we must be realistic and face this challenge head on. Sometimes when it comes to spending larger sums of money in a parish community, it can bring out disagreements. I want you to know that all three parishes have agreed to help pay for their fair share of this project which is a blessing.

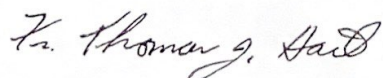
As I understand it, the current structure that is being used as a rectory was built as a convent in 1963 for the Benedictine sisters when St. Boniface had a school. This tri-parish community has done a great job over the years of improvising and making due to be efficient and provide for the needs at the time. Once the new rectory is built it will serve your current and future pastors for many years. I recognize timing could be better, and we all pray that the pandemic will subside and that soon life will return to more normalcy.

As I announced the weekend of October 25th for a couple of weeks and it was in the bulletin, the old rectory can be moved if someone is interested. The estimated cost to move it nearby of St. Boniface is approximately \$23,000 at the expense of whomever takes it. If you are interested or know someone that is, please contact me by email or phone. Thus far there has been no interest, so it is available to the first one to show interest.

I am seeking advice and council from many who have experience in these types of projects. Once plans are drawn up for the new rectory and we have a firm cost estimate, there will be a fundraising pledge drive at St. Boniface, St Elizabeth, and St. Francis of Assisi to help offset the construction cost. A parish or two may need to obtain a loan depending on how much money is raised from donors. Let us trust in the Lord as together we can do this.

This has not been an easy transition for any of us. 2020 has been a tough year for all of us in many ways with the pandemic and with the death of Fr. Richard as your pastor for 24 years as I know you are still grieving his loss. Bishop Taylor sent me here to be your shepherd and care for the salvation of souls and I am asking for healing in this parish to come together as one family to build the Kingdom of God. Advent is a time of new beginnings and I am asking for your prayers and faith in me as your pastor while together we enter this new beginning. Parishioners I am humbly asking for your support, respect, and cooperation. As always be assured of my prayers for each and every one of you and may God's peace be with you all.

In Christ,


Rev. Thomas J. Hart