



Saint Rocco Catholic Church

3205 Fulton Road Cleveland, OH 44109
The Oldest Italian Parish on Cleveland's West Side

Dear Parishioners:

Sia Lodato Gesu Cristo! Sempre Sia Lodato!

Last weekend, I spoke at all of the Masses to share with our parish community the sad necessity of closing the old school building which includes our parish hall, kitchen and gym. As it ought to be in any family, a parent in the household should speak with his/her spouse and/or other immediate family members to share any new developments in their lives before that “news” becomes public or is put into “print”. I believe it is my duty and responsibility as the Pastor to personally speak to everyone - gathered as a family around the altar of the Lord for Eucharist, and as a family, to share any pertinent development(s) in the life of the parish before sharing any such news on social media and/or in print.

In June of 2016, I contracted the Summit Testing and Inspection Company to do “subsurface exploration logs” along the east wall of the school building. The conclusion was that after drilling three holes, 40 feet deep, they only found silt; no solid soil or bedrock. This and probably decades of poor drainage have caused the foundation to give way and cause the wall to sink. The chimney in the center of the east wall, does not show evidence of movement most possibly due to a deeper and wider foundation precisely for the chimney. The majority of movement/ sinking is at the south-east end of the wall.

In June 2019, I invited Cramer Engineering and FOX Brothers to come and give another assessment of the old school building. Their conclusion was that the building was sinking/moving and that the steel joists were pulling away from the walls along with serious interior masonry damage occurring. It was determined that the building had little time left; we should not use the first and second floors of the school. The gym and hall were still considered “safe.” So, in order to keep our parish school open, after much consultation with our Principal, Mrs. Cerny, I gave the green light to discontinue the Day Care / Pre School Program and re-organize the Contardi Childhood Center to accommodate the majority of our school students (grades PreK 4 to 6th Grade). The 7th & 8th Grades used the classrooms in old school basement at the north end of the building since that area was still deemed to be safe.

During the past year, an anonymous interested party in the future of St. Rocco Grade School, hired Kaczmar Architects to do an assessment of the old school building. Kaczmar Architects invited Thomarios Engineering to offer their conclusions. Based upon the findings by Summit Testing, Cramer & Osborn Engineering, Thomarios Engineering offered their assessment to us the week before last. The following is only a part of the report:

“...We reiterate in this letter that the issues are significant enough to make the building unsafe for occupancy. The bowing of the wall and the sagging floor condition represent a trigger condition that could fail. The progressive nature of failures really renders the entire building unsafe. The number of years that have passed without any remediation since these issues were first discovered should raise the sense of urgency.”

The building has lost structural integrity due to the east wall bowing at the partial second floor collapse location. The bowing wall is an active condition impacted by wind or seismic load conditions and by thermal growth and contraction through seasonal and even daily changes. An occupied floor also represents an active condition wanting to push the wall out and further collapse the floor. Loss of structural integrity results in a geometric instability that triggers a progressive collapse; highly technical terms but simple to understand. Integrity loss relates to individual member failure or connection failure. We have both of those with the bowing of the wall causing the floor to lose its bearing connection support and collapse the floor. The floor is pushing on the wall as it wants to fall. Buildings are required to be built within certain tolerances of plumbness and levelness. All members interconnected and built within

these tolerances provide the necessary geometric stability to provide a safe building. The bowed wall and collapsed floor are not within acceptable tolerances and result in a geometric instability that predicates collapse.

This building is in the first stages of collapse based on the existence of the conditions discussed above. Time is the unknown..."

Having fully understood the gravity of the situation, I needed to send this to the proper Officials in the Diocese of Cleveland. Within a couple of days I received the following from Mr. L. Murtaugh, Executive Director of Diocese Facilities Corporation:

"...Based on the three engineering reports, (Cramer, Osborn and Thomarios) by all accounts the structural condition of the building has been seriously compromised. Because of this condition, the building is unsafe for anyone to enter.

As per Fr. Don Oleksiak, the Diocesan Administrator, the building represents a hazard to the public and must be locked with signs posted indicating that this building is unsafe and off limits to all effective immediately..."

In the meantime, our School Principal, Mrs. Cerny will work with the Office of Catholic Education and the Superintendent, Dr. Frank O'Linn in the guaranteeing/ planning our upcoming school year. We will be renting modular classrooms (4) and have them securely anchored near the newer school building (Contardi Center). This will enable us to provide a safe environment and continually improve Catholic Education for our neighborhood children. The modular classrooms will be rented - so we will be looking for benefactors to help cover the monthly lease fee. There will be more details regarding this in the future. Despite all the unfortunate news about the old building, we are optimistic for a great new school year beginning after Labor Day! As of today, enrollment for the Fall is looking good and for the end of June, we have a higher number of registrations than we have had in a good number of years.

As an alumnus of St. Rocco School, Class of 79', I have many memories of the old school building and the old Kindergarten Building! Many of you know as well as I do that memories are a precious gift, but if they hold us back from moving forward, those memories are not serving our benefit but rather they imprison us. As Catholics we know that the Gospel impels us to always be on the move! God's Church is a Church on the MOVE! There is no room for stagnancy or simple maintaining...the Spirit enlightens us to be about Mission and Movement. Think of the memories our ancestors had from Trent Avenue and the first church. What would have happened/ not happened, had Fr. Gattuso not had vision to purchase land on Fulton Rd. and plan to build a school and church? Why did our ancestors desire to build the new church during the 1940's realizing it in 1952'? Our ancestors were not content with the second church; it had served its purpose and was no longer adequate. Why did the parish pull together and build the Contardi Center? Because there was a valid need and the parish needed an adequate building. By the way, thank God it was built!

My friends, stop and think about it... movement, building new editions and change is all a sign of LIFE, MISSION and GROWTH in a parish. At times, buildings outgrow their use, their efficiency and purpose.... The same is true of our old school building. It has served us well, but it is "tired." It is time for us to think outside the box; let us pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help us discern; to look to the future and not be afraid.

Viva San Rocco!

Prayers for a blessed week – *Fr. James, O.de M.*