

Saint Joseph's South School Building Update 4-30-23

[First, regarding the church, everyone has seen that more stone has fallen or was removed from the bell tower. We know that this is an ongoing maintenance issue where the lower masonry structure meets the upper wood structure. It seems like these last few months have been especially windy and here is the result. There is a "100 year" solution but it so expensive that it is out of our reach right now.]



Please forgive me if you have heard some of this before, but as time passes there seems to be more and more misinformation arising. I believe that everything I report here is factual and not my opinion.

WHAT IS THE TRUE PROBLEM?

In mid-August, we discovered a big problem with the wooden roof trusses in the South Building. There are probably more than 100 broken truss components throughout the attic. By simply walking across the attic to install the new heating and cooling systems some 2x8 bottom chords were broken as well, causing the ceiling in one classroom to drop **5 inches**.

The Parish and School leadership quickly decided to relocate everyone temporarily to the North Building until we could find a solution. This was one week before school started. Everyone co-operated wonderfully to move the students. Thank you especially to the teachers; their rooms were all ready for the first day of school and it all had to be moved.

DID WE FILE AN INSURANCE CLAIM?

Yes. Our Business Manager, Joann Palm, filed an insurance claim application with the Diocese of Toledo and shortly thereafter a claims representative met with us. We asked them to bring in a structural engineer to evaluate our situation. The engineer determined that it was the chemical added to the wood components of the trusses to make them fireproof that had turned the wood brittle and not repairable. He recommended a complete replacement of the roof structure.

Six weeks after that meeting, the insurance company that the diocese employs to oversee all claims determined that this structural problem is not covered by our policy. They included the language of the policy as proof. I and others agree that

we are, regretfully, not covered. Furthermore, almost no one has a policy to cover this problem.

SO IS THERE ANYONE ELSE TO PAY FOR THIS MESS?

Can we sue the builder? They were following the blueprints. Can we sue the architect? He designed the building following the Ohio Building and Fire Codes. Can we sue the truss manufacturer? They used fire-treated wood that was approved for use in our Building. Can we sue the Cleveland Wood Preserving Company? It appears they are out of business - go figure.

HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO REPAIR?

A couple of builders put together a rough estimate for replacing the roof - but please realize that there is much more to it than replacing the roof. Everything from the suspended ceiling up would need to be removed and replaced including lighting, wiring, computer network, fire alarm, intercom, insulation, overhangs and, of course, the trusses, roof sheathing and shingles. That rough estimate was between \$360,000 and \$420,000.

DO WE HAVE A PLAN TO RAISE THE MONEY?

This summer a group of parishioners worked together to develop an outline of a plan to fund the replacement project. Please keep in mind that the Bishop of Toledo owns all the land and buildings in each parish, therefore, we asked the Diocese for permission, as required, to proceed raising funds and rebuilding. The plan includes reaching out to school alumni and pursuing grants from entities that support schools, building projects, and Catholic education. Directly asking active parishioners for a pledge is at the end of that plan. You will recall that in between the discovery of damage and rejection of our insurance claim we were all dutifully making a sacrificial gift to the diocese for the "Living Christ" capital campaign, so this group recognizes that our local money is limited. Would the Diocese loan us the money? The terms to qualify for a loan from the Diocese are so restrictive that this is probably not even an option.

SO, WHAT DOES THE DIOCESE SAY ABOUT ALL THIS?

In the last several months the diocese has been studying our "situation" and it intends to make some recommendations to us in the near future. We know that it is looking at the finances of the school and the parish. The Diocese is concerned about the percentage of money that the parish contributes to support our school. It is looking at school enrollment and how it is trending.

What the diocese has told us is that, because of the “Living Christ” campaign, no parish will be permitted to start their own capital campaign until May of 2025.

The Diocese has not said whether we will be allowed to rebuild.

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO THE DIOCESE?

As I understand it, our ancestors created a school before the bishop would agree to create our parish - so the education of our children is a longtime mission for us.

The truth of our situation is that enrollment is steady, and the parish subsidy of the school is less than it was ten, twenty, thirty years ago thanks, in part, to the Ohio Ed Choice tuition program.

Senate Bill 11 is currently being considered in the Ohio legislature. It proposes to open school choice even further whereby tuition money, collected from the Ohio taxpayer, and distributed by the state, would follow each student to any Ohio accredited school of the parents’ choice. Saint Joseph’s School receives the maximum allowed to private schools by the state under the current Ohio Ed Choice Program, \$5,500. SB 11 has a long way to go, but it has been suggested that each student would be allotted twice that amount, and it would an equal amount no matter the type of school.

Why do I mention SB 11? If our tuition income doubled, the amount of parish subsidy would decrease. And that problem would be solved.

I would also remind everyone that our parish finances have been running in the black for several years.

None of this could happen without the support of everyone here, and of some who were here, and of some who wish they were here.

Another positive for our parish and school is our leadership. Father Smith and Ms. Sanders, along with their staff, are committed to making our parish and our school even better.

So, will the diocese close our school? I’m not the bishop, but history says no. The decision to close a school has been traditionally a decision at the parish level. We do look forward to the recommendations from the bishop’s office.

DO WE NEED THE SOUTH SCHOOL BUILDING WHEN THE NORTH BUILDING IS WORKING FINE?

Yes. Although everyone is in the North Building, there is enough classroom space, although preschool seems really cramped. We were working on a plan to move the restrooms from the basement to the current office space. The current restroom spaces were to be used for much needed storage. Now the school principal and secretary share that one-room office space, so private meetings with the principal are very difficult. And then there is the tutoring required by some students - there is no dedicated space for those classes. So, it sort-of works in the short-term, but returning to the South Building will be much better for all.

No decision has been made by anyone whether to rebuild the South School Building or not.

SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

We have braced up the worst trusses in the South Building. We keep checking for new problem areas. There is no indication of a roof collapse. We have padlocked the building for safety's sake. We are working on moving the fire alarm panel to the Convocation Center so that school staff won't need to enter for fire drills. So there continues to be expenses associated with a building we are NOT using including full insurance.

In the North school Building, there are plans in the works to make improvements for next school year - some minor improvements to the restrooms (paid for by the Living Christ Rebate) and a rearranging of spaces for offices, tutoring and storage.

A FEW LAST FINANCIAL ITEMS

Please continue to make your "Living Christ" pledges as we all promised Bishop Thomas. Contribute to the ACA campaign if you'd like. To correct a bit of a rumor, the parish is not responsible if we don't reach our ACA pledge goal. This rule only applies to the Priest's Retirement Fund.

Any extra donation that you can make to the parish or school to cover these unexpected costs is needed more than ever. An extra \$5 a week would take some pressure off of our budget. If you are able, mark it for maintenance and the diocese won't even tax it and it will be spent wisely here.

Are there any questions?

St Joseph's South School Building — extra questions

Q1 - Can we apply for grants now since the Parish can't ask for financial help? Such as a group like Catholic Extension?

A - Father researched them today and it is an awesome cause... but they only help with isolated and/or financially under-resourced Catholic dioceses in the United States. These areas are called "Extension dioceses". The Diocese of Toledo is not a part of the church that they serve. But there has already been identified two dozen or so entities that may be interested in assisting us. The question being sorted out is "in whose name to we ask for a grant?" UPDATE : At this point, we are NOT allowed to apply for any grants or campaign in ANY way for the roof. If we tie any fundraiser or grant applications to the roof or ANY capital improvement project without diocesan approval, and Toledo gets wind of it, Fr. Jeff will receive a very uncomfortable call from the diocese.

Q2 - Who was the person who checked out the Cleveland Wood Preservation Company? How long has it been closed?

A - Steve Marek spent a few hours searching for anything on this company. Only one very old bit of information was found. No LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter mentions or accounts were found - like they haven't been in existence this century. Since there were no volunteers to go the next step, we will search for someone to hire to investigate this company further and who their insurance company was/is - maybe action can be taken against one of them. It was pointed out that since the Bishop of Toledo owns the building only he can pursue an action to recover his loss.

Q3 - Can a temporary structure be built to protect the building roof and allow us to remove the damaged structure ourselves?

A - Where will that money come from and what do we do with the temporary structure where we don't need it anymore? Those men that worked to shore-up the worst part of the structure can attest to the unpredictable and fragile nature of the wooden trusses. If there was roof covering, that may mean that all demolished materials would have to be carried out a door or the small windows. Furthermore,

the new trusses couldn't be set in place with a crane and probably are far too heavy and unwieldy to set by hand.

Q4 - Is there any way to redirect our "Living Christ" campaign money to this project?

A - Our 35% rebate has already started to trickle in as we pay our pledges. Father, with the consultation of the Finance Committee, has already chosen to use our rebate for improvement to the school restrooms and for the South School Building roof (we meant shingle replacement at the time.) It will take another five years to receive all of our rebate. Will the diocese return any more than the 35%? This question is too early to know the answer too.

Q5 - Why haven't we hired an attorney to represent the interests of the parish in regards to the rejection of the insurance claim?

A - It was pointed out that since the Bishop of Toledo owns the building only he can pursue an action to recover his loss. The parish has suffered the loss of the use of the Bishop's building and some, by comparison, minor expenses to relocate to the North Building. The parish is not being forced to do anything by the Bishop at this point. We've not been asked to foot the entire cost of the rebuild or even to demolish ~~the~~ his building. And if we are allowed to use an attorney other than the Diocesan attorney it will be at our own expense. That is not a planned expense and it will require additional donations to finance.

Q6 - Will we/can we set up special fund for rebuild donations, such as GoFundMe?

A - Not by using the parishes name or accounts. This would break the Bishops moratorium on capital campaigns for the next two years. It was suggested that another trusted entity might be used to solicit, and receive grants and donations outside the control of the parish and diocese. This entity would need to be a charitable organization that is set up to receive tax-deductible donations and would pay out those monies at the appropriate time (if the Bishop would accept it.)
UPDATE: We can NOT raise money for the roof in ANY way until May of 2025.

Q7 - Can we simply place envelopes in the pews saying, "South Roof?"

A – NO! Someone at the bishop's office may conclude that Father is cooperating with a plan against the Bishop's moratorium.

Q8 - Are there other places/buildings affected by this wood fire treatment too?

A - We've heard only anecdotal evidence from one party regarding this problem.