

REV. ERIC M. AUGENSTEIN

NATIVITY CATHOLIC CHURCH – THE RETURN TO THE CHURCH

JANUARY 25/26, 2020

Well – here we are! 72 years after the founding of a parish here in the southeastern corner of Indianapolis – 54 years after the Great Fire that destroyed the first Barn Church – 51 years after the current church building was constructed and a cold Midnight Mass was celebrated in the not-quite-finished space. After many years of planning and prayer – about two years since the beginning of a Capital Campaign – 9 months since construction began – and a month after the Dedication and Anointing of the Altar and Walls – we are now ready for a new birth, a move the likes of which this parish hasn't seen in 50 years. As the title of our Capital Campaign foretold: *The Future is Now!* And we are ready to move back into our renovated and expanded church for good!

A lot has happened since we last gathered in the church for Masses on Christmas Day. The floor has been laid throughout the building – tile, vinyl, and carpet in various areas. Wood wainscoting and trim have been added to the walls. Cabinets have been installed in the sacristies – glass in the interior windows – and new sets of doors added between the gathering area and the church. Pews arrived onsite last Thursday, and a crew has been diligently working to assemble and install them – yes, the pews are shipped in pieces and assembled on site, and that work has been moving along nicely. This coming week, a final coat of paint will be spread and finishing touches will be added throughout the building. On Friday, we move. And on Saturday, we celebrate Mass in the church. And again on Sunday – and all the days moving forward.

Now, there are some things that will continue to be added in the weeks and months ahead. The bronze ring that goes around the new baptismal font is being forged in these days but likely won't arrive until the first week of February. The Stations of the Cross are not in yet, but our hope is that they will be here for the beginning of Lent. The stained-glass windows in the sanctuary and the Reconciliation Room should be here for Easter. Landscaping will be done as the weather warms up this spring. And there will be little things that we'll keep working on in the weeks ahead. But by next weekend, the work will be 98 or 99% complete, and the church will be ready for the Church – the people of God – to gather for Mass and the Sacraments.

As with any major transition, it's going to take a while to live in to the space. We have the advantage of having celebrated Mass in the church already for the Dedication and Christmas – and we got some good feedback and ideas from those Masses – but still, some of the logistics for liturgical ministers, the flow of the building, and where things will go will need some time to figure out. As an example, we're not going to hang bulletin boards or information signs right away – we want to see how we use the space first before deciding where to hang parish and community information. Next weekend, the First Weekend of February, we will have our First Sunday Sharing Collection as usual, but we ask that this be a monetary collection only – we don't know yet where the best place will be for food and other physical donations, so if you could hold off on those kinds of items for this month, that will give us time to learn the space.

A few final notes to get us ready for the move. First, a reminder that we could use some volunteers this Friday afternoon beginning at 1 pm for The Big Move – if you're available, we'd love to have your help. On Saturday, February 1, there will be two opportunities for Liturgical Ministers to get oriented to the space, at 10 am and 1 pm. Also, a reminder that Mass next Saturday will be an hour earlier than normal – 4:30 pm – just for that one day because of that evening's Reverse Raffle. Sunday Masses will be at the regular times of 8:30 and 11:00 am. All of those times and details are in today's bulletin and on the parish website.

As we prepare to move back into the church, we also bid farewell to this temporary worship space, the Holy Family Chapel. There's part of me that will miss the intimacy of this space – we have certainly gotten to know each other quite well in here over the past 9 months! But our Parish Center will get back to being just the Parish Center – and for the first time in a while, we'll all be able to be in one room to worship and pray together, and we won't have to go out into the hallway for communion! And no more setting up chairs every Saturday – I know there's at least a few people who are looking forward to that part, and we're grateful for the commitment and generosity of our parishioners who helped make this building into a chapel, week after week.

And so with all that, let's turn to our Lord in thanksgiving. For the work of God that has taken place here at Nativity for over 70 years, we give thanks. For the generosity and sacrifices of those who have made this renovation project possible, we give thanks. For the architects and engineers, the construction crew and artisans, we give thanks. For the gift of a community of faith, we give thanks. For the Word of God and the Grace of the Eucharist that sustains us, we give thanks.

I'll see you next weekend in the church!