

RE-IMAGINING: Another time-line disrupted

There was an update in the pre-Lent newsletter on the re-imagining of our church that anticipated a series of parish meetings in the spring or early summer. Having already expressed regret at failing to hold similar meetings in 2019, as had been suggested in a foolishly optimistic update in February of that year, I stated emphatically that this year “a concrete and, we think, intriguing and beneficial plan”

would be ready to share with parishioners within a few weeks. “And,” I concluded, “this year we mean it!” Thankfully, in hindsight, I also added, “I hope.”

Of course we all know what caused the disruption.

To be sure, we were right on track. The re-imagining team met March 3 to tweak a proposal that had been reviewed by the Pastoral and Finance councils. However, a joint meeting of those groups on

March 30 had to be canceled, as was a meeting for March 24 that I’d scheduled to bring Bishop Callahan into the loop. The Pastoral Council gave its final endorsement at a Zoom meeting on April 16.

And now, we wait.

It’s essential that plan be presented to parishioners in-person, not on Zoom. And, ideally, that could be done when we are not distracted by fears of infection and the restrictions of dis-

tance and masks. And so, I say again, we wait.

As a brief review, a primary goal of the re-imagining process was to establish a direct connection between the baptismal font and altar, as well as to create a more natural flow of people and processions moving into and out of church.

I’ll conclude this update with no assurances, only a hope that we won’t have to keep waiting for too long.

— Fr. Tom

TRANSITION PLEASE ALLOW ME TO SHARE NEWS FROM MY FORMER PARISH

Just before churches closed and worship and programs ceased, Holy Spirit parish, my former community in Stevens Point, was in the throes of celebration — even in Lent.

When I came to St. Anne, the parish was concluding a \$4.5 million capital campaign for a new parish center. Construction began in May 2019 and was dedicated on March 8. I was honored to be part of the celebration and delighted to see the amazing facility. (I wrote this column for the bulletin shortly after the dedication, but a pandemic got in the way of its publication.)

Nearly \$500,000 of project funds came from the sale of the parish’s campus ministry center on the UW-Stevens Point campus. I gathered with a few hundred parishioners in February to pray and say farewell to that facility, which had wonderfully served the parish and Catholic college students as a center of prayer, study, community life, and a few naps for 45 years. The Newman Center was my home, or at least the location of my office, for 22 years. Many parishioners and former students who returned

to say goodbye felt a similar affinity. It was a bittersweet occasion. Good things await in the new center, but it was emotional to leave this place so full of memories — of great people, occasions of celebration and sadness, and the assorted wonders of life.

The sale of this building marks the last vestige of what was Newman University Parish. In 2015, Newman and a neighboring parish, St. Stanislaus Kostka, unified to form Holy Spirit Parish. I was pastor of both and became the founding pastor of the new community. At that time, Newman left the Sisters of St. Joseph Convent Chapel where the parish had worshipped for four decades, another occasion of considerable sadness. The new parish continued to utilize the Newman Center, but it soon became apparent that consolidating offices, programming and worship at one site was necessary, which prompted the campaign, the sale of the campus ministry center, and construction of the new facility.

It’s all good, but also challenging. It important that the people of this new parish look more expan-



Participating in the Newman Center farewell in February were Fr. Steve Brice, Holy Spirit’s current pastor and a long-time St. Anne pastor, and Fr. Mark Pierce of Resurrection and St. Michael parishes who was Newman’s pastor in the early 1990s.

sively — beyond their own turf and ideas of how “it’s always been,” to consider what was best for this new parish and its mission as it charges further into the 21st century. It’s human nature to cling to the past, to hold on to our identity — this is who we are! — but these people resisted that instinct.

While we dedicated a new building that is just beginning, now, again, to come to life with use, it’s really the community that deserves recognition. It’s the people who realized the Church must evolve. Responding to the gospel, even *where* that happens, cannot remain static. The new facility is a manifestation of the Church moving forward, responding necessarily to changing circumstances, and looking beyond emotion to realize a greater, collective good. — Fr. Tom