

14 December 2020

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

While the pandemic sometimes keeps us apart, please know that your health and safety is kept close to my heart and daily in my prayers.

We are well into the Advent season, a time of hopeful anticipation. I know all of us are hopeful that the year 2021 will bring about a cure for the coronavirus. In the meantime, our staff prepares for modified Christmas celebrations that ensure a safe worship experience for everyone involved.

By now, you may have noticed there are no Christmas Masses scheduled to be celebrated at Sacred Heart Church. Because Christmas is such a special time, and so many of you will miss celebrating Mass in the parish you call home, I thought it was important to take you through what has happened there, not just in the last few years, but specifically in the last few months.

As you may recall, water damage has plagued Sacred Heart since 2012. Many attempts to sure up the interior, exterior and underground drains of the building have been made over the last eight years, but those attempts were stifled in 2017 when a large section of plaster fell from the wall near the altar.

Work immediately began to repair that section, but the porous stone of the building was relentlessly infiltrated by water. The more we repaired, the more damage we found, including asbestosis in the walls which we've been mitigating since August. I want to assure that hundreds of hours have been dedicated to the repair of brick, stone and plaster, but that same plaster continues to fall off the walls.

Earlier this fall, we asked the insurance company to get us updated claim information. Sadly, what started as a \$300,000 claim has nearly doubled. At this point, we do not know how much of the damage the insurance company will even cover.

When I saw this number, I knew immediately that it was time to halt work on the building and bring together the pastoral and finance councils of Sacred Heart and Ascension Parishes for a meeting with the Diocese of Greensburg's Director of Facilities and the Diocesan Administrator.

You may be aware that Bishop Malesic was appointed Bishop of Cleveland in September. What you may not know is that a Diocesan Administrator has been appointed to oversee day to day operations of the Diocese of Greensburg until a new bishop is appointed. His name is Monsignor Larry Kulick. He, along with Jim Garvin, Director of Facilities, attended the meeting.

The group met at the beginning of December and understands we should wait until a new Bishop is appointed before making the decision about whether or not to move forward with nearly \$600,000 in repair work to Sacred Heart, especially when we do not know how much of the cost the insurance company may cover. Each member of the pastoral and finance councils expressed an understanding that dwindling demographics and limited financial resources may make it difficult for Sacred Heart parishioners to pay for the needed repairs.

Having said that, we will continue to work with the insurance company to make sure we receive a fair settlement for the damage. When a new Bishop arrives, our pastoral and finance councils will meet with him to decide what the next steps should be.

The members of Sacred Heart Parish have been extremely gracious about relocating to Ascension Parish for Masses, and I thank you for that. At Christmastime, I invite you to attend Mass at Ascension, where we will have the opportunity for overflow into Mersinger Hall.

I, too, am saddened that we cannot celebrate Christmas at Sacred Heart. But I am hopeful that the new year will bring us closer to a solution. May God be with you and your family during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

In Christ,

(Rev.) Michael P. Sikon  
Pastor