

*I PRESENTED THE FOLLOWING AT THE end of Sacred Heart's Masses last weekend, April 14/15 to announce the launch of the campus renovation capital campaign. I'm printing it below due to the poor attendance resulting from the ice storm on those days:*

We all need the basics of life, and this parish does a great deal of good through the Sacred Heart Mission and our other ministries to assist the local needy.

There's more than one kind of neediness, however. Usually, we think of the needy as the financially poor. But what about the spiritually needy? Many people may be materially wealthy, while simultaneously impoverished spiritually.

Regardless of whether someone is financially poor or spiritually poor or both, can a church building—the very “brick and mortar” of the structure—serve to enrich the poor?

As you know, the Strategic Planning Team, beginning under Fr. Cotter in 2013, has been looking at the best way to answer this question. This was in response to Bishop Cistone's call for a strategic plan from each parish five years ago. The team has been hard at work doing a thorough needs analysis.

Some of you here this evening/morning are on the team, and many more of you have participated with the team through various feedback opportunities. The team's recommendation to renovate the campus' physical plant in a phased approach has already been published. Please see this weekend's bulletin for an insert with much more detail, including a history of the team's efforts to this point.

With that in mind, I'm announcing our capital campaign, which we will launch on Memorial Day weekend. This campaign will be led by Mr. Joel Vernier and will make the renovation a reality.

You see, brothers and sisters, Sacred Heart Parish isn't a monastery. Our parishioners aren't monks who take a vow of poverty and prefer the simplicity of the cloister to the chaos of the world.

On the contrary, Sacred Heart must be, among other things, a holy place for laypeople who need to be drawn into the building through its beauty and clearly Catholic identity.

I chose the notion of “beauty” to serve as the springboard to announce the capital campaign because beauty is often erroneously dismissed as unimportant by our modern utilitarian mindset. A Catholic Church building must be far more than a roof and a place to sit.

To paraphrase Duncan Stroik, “A Catholic church for the poor does not have artwork that's abstract or ugly, but is full of beautiful images of holy men and women who overcame their sinfulness to draw close to God.

“A church building should be bursting over with color, signs, symbols, and sacraments: outward signs of inward grace. It can't be a place where the sacraments, especially the Eucharist are muted, obscured, or hidden away.

“A church should not be a modernist structure designed by soulless machines, because many of us are already surrounded and even enslaved by machines.

“A Catholic church should never look neglected. It's one of the few public buildings that those without status or money are always welcome to enter.”

In Gladwin County, we may not have many art galleries, symphonies, or stately hotels. But a beautiful church gives parishioners and visitors alike the experience of art, fine music, and nobility that evangelizes and attracts new members.

Sacred Heart is for everybody—the rich and the poor, the proud and the humble, the devout believer and the seeker.

The most uneducated can learn about God through a beautiful church, while the most arrogant can learn humility through the same because God speaks through beauty—be it the face of a newborn, the majesty of a sunset, or from the inspiration of Catholic art and architecture.

When we see beauty, we see God. Why? Because all beauty comes from Him. God speaks to us through beauty.

There used to be a time when our poor ancestors put their very best into God's house. If they could afford marble at all, it went into the church sanctuary, not into the bank or shopping mall lobby. That's because no building can better point saints and sinners alike towards Christ more than a beautiful church; a temple of God that welcomes saints and sinners, embraces them, and lifts them up.

This is an exciting time in the history of Sacred Heart Parish. Future generations will benefit from our efforts, just as we benefit today from those who sacrificed before us.

*~Fr. J. Marcel Portelli*