



Thinking Big

Ground Broken on New Church For Fast-growing LaGrangeville Parish

By MARY ANN POUST

Aspacious new church for a growing Catholic community will soon be part of southern Dutchess County's landscape of rolling hills as Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha parish begins a long-planned building project on its LaGrangeville property.

With financing commitments from the archdiocese and a parish fund-raising campaign, and approval by the local Town Planning Board, the parish officially launched the start of construction with groundbreaking ceremonies held after Sunday morning Masses Nov. 5.

Msgr. William J. Belford, the pastor, who is also vicar of Dutchess County, announced the groundbreaking to parishioners as a "historic event" and invited all of them to bring cameras and shovels and participate.

"This is a very important thing that we're doing," Msgr. Belford told CNY.

"Without it, we wouldn't be able to grow," he said. "After all, if every seat at every Mass is taken, how can we invite new people to join our parish?"

He said, "Our growth is obvious to everybody."

There were 1,575 people at weekend Masses in a count in late October, he said.

Cardinal Egan last year gave the go-ahead for the bursting-at-the-seams parish to plan a \$12 million project to include construction of a new church, the renovation of the existing church building into classrooms, and related work such as added parking space and access roads. A plan to construct a parish house on the property was placed on hold.

The cardinal promised an outright grant of \$4 million, a long-term loan of \$4 million and a short-term loan of \$4 million, which the parish will begin to pay off with money raised in its building campaign.

Msgr. Belford called the archdiocesan commitment a "great act of faith" in the parish, which is still paying a \$1.7 million debt for land purchased in recent years and the church building and rectory it now has. He added that David Maddox, director of the Archdiocesan Building Commission, is giving the project his personal attention. The architect is Donald Swartz; construction manager is MJ Fitzgerald Construction of Yonkers; and parishioner John

McFadden will volunteer as the "eyes and ears" of the pastor.

With land acquired in a recent purchase, Blessed Kateri's Route 82 property now covers 81 acres—enough not just to accommodate the new construction, but to allow for future plans as well.

"We think big up here," Msgr. Belford joked.

He said that Auxiliary Bishop Dominick J. Lagonegro, co-vicar of Orange County and pastor of Sacred Heart in Newburgh, who was administrator of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha a decade ago when it was still a mission of nearby St. Columba's, started the ball rolling with the first purchase of acreage.

Bishop Lagonegro participated in the groundbreaking ceremony held after the 10:30 a.m. Mass Sunday at Blessed Kateri, which was established as a separate parish in 2002 with Msgr. Belford becoming the first pastor.

Following the cardinal's direction to plan a large church for many future members, the new church will have seating for 1,000 people, including a balcony for about 150. There will be a side chapel, called the Holy Eucharist Chapel, for daily Masses, and another side appurtenance for a social hall called Holy Family Hall.

The church will be constructed with a steel frame with a shingle roof system and an exterior of masonry stone material and brick. Colors will be natural shades of gray, blue and rust, to blend with the site.

In the interior, the choir will have a dedicated space with movable chairs near the left side of the altar. A new digital organ is expected to be purchased from the Allen Organ Company of Allentown, Pa.

Parishioners were consulted during the planning process, first about whether a church or a gymnasium where Masses could be held should be built, and then about the design. Choosing from among seven architects' submissions, parishioners voted to have two windows in the sanctuary flanking a crucifix attached to the wall, rather than three windows and a crucifix suspended over the altar.

Stained-glass windows with scenes from the New Testament from the closed parish church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Harlem will be removed and restored for the new church. As work progresses and the time comes to order pews, parishioner input will again be sought, Msgr. Belford said.

The current church building, which was dedicated in 1999 and holds 350 people, will be converted into religious education classrooms and called the Holy Child Center for Religious Education. When the renovation is finished, it will enable the parish to offer a more desirable schedule than the five-days-a-week classes now needed for the 720 children enrolled.

"We even have classes on Friday afternoons," Msgr. Belford said. "That's something nobody does."