

September 20, 2006

Dear Parishioners of Blessed Kateri,

May the grace and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you!

With many things happening in our parish, I want to keep you updated on key developments. First, of course, I ask you to remember to pray for one another, and to honor your obligation to make Sunday a holy day by coming to Mass and receiving our Lord Jesus in Holy Communion. I also want to thank all our loyal supporters for their Sunday contributions, and for their donations for their pledges as we work together to build a new House of God and Home for Us.

1. In July we were very fortunate to welcome Father Joseph Faraone as Associate Pastor for our parish. Father Joe was a pastor for twelve years at a large parish (St. James in Carmel) and recently was at St. Denis on Beekman Rd. I am very happy that Father Joe is here to serve our growing congregation and to add to the services we can offer. Fortunately, our distinguished Jesuit Father Joseph O'Hare, SJ, will continue to drive up from Manhattan on Sundays to offer Masses for our congregation.

2. Please pray for us priests to serve you well. In your kindness also include prayers for our two candidates for the Permanent Diaconate. Mr. John Barone has finished three years of study and formation. Good reports and God willing, John will be ordained a Deacon at St. Patrick's Cathedral in June of 2007. Mr. Robert Horton has finished two years of study and formation, and he should be ordained a Deacon for our parish at the Cathedral in June of 2008.

3. Our Religious Education Program continues to provide an excellent experience of faith formation for our children in grades one to eight. Last year our registration soared to 720 students. This year we are welcoming even more children, so we have added to our offerings again. Classes are being held on Mondays at 4:30 and 7:15, Tuesdays at 2:30, 4:30, and 7:15, Wednesdays at 2:30, 4:30, and 7:15, Thursdays at 4:30 and 6:30, and even Fridays at 4:30 and 6:30. Our dedicated Director, Mrs. Mary Biasotti, will now have Mrs. Diane McCoach as a fulltime assistant, and they will facilitate the work of about five dozen volunteer teachers and aides. Thank you to everyone in this ministry!

4. For all these students, and all other activities and offerings, we only have four classrooms. Along with providing more room for more people to come to Mass, this religious education situation is a major reason why we need to build a new church very soon and renovate the present church into classrooms. Then that whole building will be for religious education; we will call it our Holy Child Center.

5. We do not have a date yet for a groundbreaking ceremony, but we expect to start work before the end of this year. As you know from this Sunday's bulletin, several items relating to safety standards and historical preservation need to be checked and completed before the Town Planning Board can give us permission to proceed. We are working to satisfy all these concerns as fast as we can. Barring exceptionally bad weather or material shortages, we hope to be worshipping in our new church in about 18 months after we start construction. That is our goal; then we can begin renovations and have more classrooms in the present church ready for our religious education students two years from right now.

6. As you know, David Maddox, Director of the Archdiocesan Building Commission, is giving this project his personal attention. I appreciate his expert guidance and support. Donald Swartz is our architect, and has been doing his part very well. John McFadden, a parishioner with 30 years experience in building and maintenance at Iona College, will be my volunteer eyes and ears on the job. With Fr. Faraone, we just completed the process of choosing a Construction Manager. The Construction Manager model is favored by the Archdiocese because it gives greater assurance of reliable results at less risk for the local parish. The "CM" is the on-site boss who coordinates and guarantees the materials and work of all the contractors. Six firms competed for this job. MJ Fitzgerald Construction of Yonkers made the best bid, with the lowest price and a proven track record of building or renovating churches such as St. Philip Neri in the Bronx, St. Francis in West Nyack, and St. John's in Pawling, all on budget and on time.

7. At this time I invite parishioners and friends of Blessed Kateri who can help us build our church to make their interest known. If you are a supplier who can get us a great price, or are in the building trades and feel that you have the size and experience to help build our church, I invite you to apply for a sub-contracting job. Send me a letter on your company letterhead, giving your skill, and I will pass that along to the CM so you can take part in the bidding. I encourage parishioner participation in this project, for your benefit and ours. However, please understand that only one can be chosen for each contract, and no one will get a job just because of being a parishioner. Everyone will be judged and hired by the CM on merit and price. We want the greatest quality and the best church for our money.

8. This church construction and renovation is history in the making, an opportunity and responsibility that comes rarely in religious people's lives. When the construction is done, I want all of us to be very pleased with and very proud of what we have done together. I want to thank everyone who is praying for the success of this project, and also especially the four hundred fifty parishioners who have already made a pledge or given a gift for this building campaign. You are not the only ones whose names will appear on the permanent memorial we will place in the vestibule of the church; I count on many others to make their pledges and gifts soon or when they can. Our records show that more than \$2,100,000 has been pledged, and \$700,000 received, as of today. My thanks to all of you.

9. In case you do not remember the financial generosity of the Archdiocese that enables us to be this close to creating a new church and more classrooms, let me tell the story again. His Eminence, Cardinal Egan, knowing our parish and believing in the future of Catholic worship in this area, gave us permission last year to plan a project of \$12 million so that we could build a new church, renovate the existing building into classrooms, construct a Parish House next to the church, create new roads and two hundred new parking spaces, etc. (This was a great act of faith in us, since we owe and are paying off a debt of \$1.7 million for the 81 acres, church building, and rectory that we now have.) To fund this new construction, His Eminence promised us an outright grant of four million dollars, a long-term loan of four million dollars to be repaid at some date in the future, and a short-term loan of four million dollars, which we will start to address by our pledge payments to the Building Campaign.

10. This spring, when we did another estimate of construction expenses in light of significant changes such as much higher building costs in the last year, two exit roads rather than one, a small chapel for daily Mass and a social hall for children's liturgies, coffees, etc, the estimate came in at \$15.5 million. To preserve all the important things that we need in the church and classroom building, we decided to take the Parish House out of our present plans, and hope to build it at another time. With other cuts and changes, we aim to build everything else for the budget that was approved.

11. I would like new or recently registered members of our parish to know that parishioners have been informed about our plans and consulted on choices from the beginning of this process. Parishioners were asked if we should build a church or a gym. Parishioners picked the design of the church 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. Key members of the building team have been here on Sundays and spoken at the Masses, including Tom Glisson and Anne Williamson, our liturgical design consultants for the church interior.

12. This is going to be a large building. As directed by His Eminence, we are planning ahead to provide space for many future members. There will be seating for a thousand people, including a balcony for about 150. One of Anne's contributions this summer was to show us a way to configure the interior of the church in such a way as to avoid long rows. We know that people like to sit at the end of a pew, so we are sacrificing some seats to make extra aisles. And when it is time to choose those pews, we will arrange a display of the best choices and give everybody a chance to indicate their preferences among them: padded seats or plain wood, backs straight or curved, kind of kneeler, etc.

13. During the summer we made another pilgrimage to the closed parish church of St. Thomas the Apostle in Harlem, to consult with the firm that will remove, repair, and remount beautiful one-hundred-year-old stained glass windows that will be a key feature of our new church. And we made some decisions, subject to budget review, for the outside of our building. It will be steel stud truss construction with masonry cladding and fifty year shingle roof. In a few weeks we will bring to church some of the stones and bricks we propose to use for you to see. The pre-dominant colors are shades of gray and blue. That will complement the present building, but the church materials will be stone rather than vinyl.

14. Our choir will have its own dedicated space with moveable chairs, near the left side of the altar as you look from the back. With Music Director Nina Ricci and organist/consultant Sue LaGrande I went in August to visit the factory of the Allen Organ Company near Allentown, PA. A pipe organ is beyond our budget or need, given that digital organs can reproduce wonderful sounds at much less cost, space, and maintenance. Most likely we will be purchasing an Allen Renaissance Quantum digital organ, model Q385. This is a powerful instrument, required by the large space of our new church. It will cost about one hundred thousand dollars, including construction, many speakers, cabinets, and installation. We are deciding on this now because large spaces need to be designed in the front of the church and on the back wall to house the speakers, and cable conduits for the organ have to be laid in the floor.

This is a long letter, but I hope that you want to know as much as you can about your church, what we plan to do, and what more we can do together. For example:

* Attending daily Mass is a great way to make your life better and happier. Each of us prays in private, but coming together for Mass and Holy Communion is special. Our weekday Mass schedule is now 9am, Monday to Friday. Come whenever you can.

* We have just started another devotional opportunity: private prayer in church before the Blessed Sacrament on the First Friday of each month. Eucharistic adoration is a wonderful experience. If you can, come and pray in the Presence of Jesus sometime from after the 9am Mass until 5pm.

* Father Faraone and I are chaplains to the Knights of Columbus LaGrange Council #13378 – one of the youngest, fastest growing Councils in New York State. Recently the Knights rented a building on Noxon Road, across from the athletic fields, and have spent a lot of time and talent to transform this space into a beautiful Council Hall that will be available for rental. Call 454-1344 for details and dates.

Faithfully yours in Christ,

Monsignor William Belford