

Around One Table – Expanding Our Home

St. Bede Parish Continues the Journey Forward

(This report is the 3rd in the series. Reports No. 1 & 2 are available on line)

May 2008 marks the 5th anniversary of the dedication of what many still refer to as the ‘new’ St. Bede Catholic Church. But the idea for a new Church began in the mid 1990’s when the vision of building a new facility was first seriously discussed. At that time, the Parish made a commitment to respond to the growth of the Catholic population in Williamsburg by putting an end to the increasing frustration of parking on Richmond Road in order to attend Mass at either a Church that was too small or in the Parish Center that was never designed to accommodate liturgical functions. So a beautiful and spacious worship space was built, bringing to reality the dream of worshipping at “One Table” – the name given to the campaign. But the new Church only solved a portion of the growth problem. There was always intended to be another phase to the campaign, one that would include space for education, social and fellowship activities, and the ability to merge all administrative functions into one facility.

This report is designed to educate in more detail the Parish regarding the present status of St. Bede’s facilities, focusing on certain *key elements* of ministerial functions. The Around One Table Committee hopes you find this information helpful in understanding why the current Church building was never designed for, and cannot accommodate adequately, **all** the needs of a Parish with 3,300 families and over 8,300 parishioners, including 1,700 children and young adults less than 18 years of age.

Key Element No. 3 Problems Associated with Functioning as a Two Campus Parish

When the new Church was dedicated in May 2003 its administrative operations were destined to become a work in progress. Our former pastor, Msgr. William Carr, recognized quickly that his ability to function from the old rectory or Parish Center was compromised. The ‘hub’ of activity was transitioning to the Ironbound site, yet there was knowingly no suite of offices in the new Church building to accommodate him or any of the other functioning administrative operations. Leadership’s primary focus became the rectory, and a plan was initiated to build a new one somewhere on the new Church grounds – using proceeds from the sale of the old rectory. Unfortunately, the Master Plan approved by James City County did not include a rectory. Plans became stalled, the old rectory was sold, and very quickly our priests were facing the real possibility of living in rented quarters until a solution could be found. Lots of praying and a bit of luck produced that solution – the availability of a beautiful home on property adjacent to the Ironbound campus. That building was purchased just about the time that our new Pastor, Father Abe, arrived.

In the meantime, the two campus scenario was becoming the functioning norm for the Parish. More importantly, St. Bede’s relationship with the primary user of the ‘old’ Church – the Catholic Campus Ministry (CCM) – began to experience transitional pains. The students had been promised use of both the Chapel and the Parish Center. Since CCM remained a functional ministry of St. Bede, the maintenance of both buildings would, at the Diocese’s request, remain the responsibility of St. Bede. So, out of both necessity and love for the students, historically members of the St. Bede Parish family, the Parish continued to serve the students but also carry on a large portion of Parish administrative functions using the Center on Harrison St. – 4 miles from the epicenter on Ironbound Road. Consider the following:

Did you know.....

that there are at least 10 members of the parish staff still providing services from the Harrison St. location? This set of offices requires its own group of volunteers to assist with everything from accounting to religious education functions.

that since the new Church was built, St. Bede has made extensive but necessary improvements to both the CCM Chapel and the Parish Center – totaling more than \$150,000? These improvements included correcting various building and safety deficiencies, replacing the boiler and air conditioning systems, repairing the Parish Center roof, refinishing numerous pews in the Chapel, and extensive exterior restoration and painting.

that the Stewardship office, in order to be more accessible to parishioners, moved from the Parish Center to Ironbound Road only to end up in what was the Liturgy Storage Room, accessible only by entering the nave of the Church and proceeding around to the right by the crucifix? Electronic connections to that make-shift office have been continually problematic.

that the parish maintains two complete office equipment suites with multiple servers, copiers, faxes, and phones? (Achieving an economy of scale - the ability to save money by consolidating functions – is a process currently foreign to many aspects of St. Bede’s budget.)

St. Bede’s beloved Social Ministry also remains headquartered in the Parish Center. For those of you that have never visited that operation, it is a jewel in the middle of a less than conducive environment for serving people in need. Social Ministry staff must conduct private client interviews in the large social hall/sanctuary that is a constant walk-through for others using the center; food pantry and storage is confined to a space used for meetings and Mass on weekends; and there is the ever present concern for security in a building with multiple doors.

Communication is essential in a Parish the size of St. Bede. With 4 miles separating the two campuses, the inability to converse with each other and the Pastor face to face on a routine basis is obvious. Technological connections have not solved the problem. Computer glitches are routine, resulting in loss of work and the need for unnecessary overtime. The networking system is functioning with less than optimal cable connections between the two campuses, and because of these problems the parish is likely to spend thousands of dollars for a temporary solution until a permanent consolidation is achieved.

The expense of maintaining both the Campus Ministry Chapel and the Parish Center buildings will be eliminated once St. Bede’s staff is able to vacate that location. This assurance has been given to St. Bede by the Bishop, whereby at that point the maintenance of these buildings will become the primary responsibility of the Diocese. In the meantime, CCM and its contributors have continued to lessen the burden on St. Bede by raising an ever-increasing amount of money for operational expenses, for which the Parish is extremely grateful.

This discussion concludes the series of reports that have been issued in an effort to educate the entire parish about St. Bede’s ministerial limitations. Previously we discussed the need for education and catechetical space, the limited ability to offer parishioners the variety of social and fellowship activities typically found in a Catholic community the size of St. Bede, and the expensive and inefficient system required to maintain two campuses. In the coming weeks and months, the Around One Table Committee will be refining its work to offer the parish an appropriate solution to these issues. In the meantime, stay informed by reading our updates. We thank those of you who participated in the parish-wide survey, and trust that all of us, together as a parish community, will be able to solve these problems. Most of all – pray for the success of this collaborative effort. May God continue to bless St. Bede and its hundreds of dedicated and involved families and parishioners. Thank you.

The Around One Table Committee

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