

Around One Table – Expanding Our Home

St. Bede Parish Continues the Journey Forward

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. 1 Education & Catechetical Space

For almost 15 years, the bulk of Religious Education of St. Bede’s K-8 youth has taken place on Sunday mornings at Walsingham Academy – a private Catholic School 3 miles from the new Church. Thanks to the generosity of the Sisters of Mercy, St. Bede uses up to 24 classrooms at their facility at no cost. Almost 500 students attend, brought there by parents who then have to figure out transportation scheduling to attend Mass at another time that does not conflict with classes. Why, then, do we only have classes on Sunday? Because, as you might expect, the classrooms at Walsingham are not available at any other times during the week.

In addition, there is no room at Walsingham for high school students on Sunday mornings. These young people attend Religious Education on Sunday evenings - limited to one room in the basement of the Church. If parents have students in both middle and high school, and they want to fulfill their responsibility of making sure their children participate, Sunday Mass and Religious Education becomes an all day event. Scheduling is a challenge, attendance can suffer. Quite simply, St. Bede’s Religious Education program works only because the devoted staff and parents make it work. Growth projections could exceed 40%, as the K-5 classes are now full and will soon be impacting the grade 6-8 levels. Consider the following:

Did you know.....

that demographic studies indicate that by 2012 the K-5 segment of our youth population is expected to reach 500? That’s 150 more than we can currently accommodate at Walsingham.

that while, on a limited basis, many school supplies remain at Walsingham in locked 2 drawer file cabinets during the week, some supplies need to be transported each Sunday to and from the school, especially since there is no access to a copier?

that there is a room in our Church for religious education? It is, however, in the basement, inaccessible to the handicapped (there are 26 steps), and its overall size of 30'x34' could be acceptable if there weren't more than 80 kids who sometimes need to be in there at one time.

that the freshman class has at times used the Commons as a classroom to ease the overcrowding? Groups of 10th grade students use the 'mechanical room' in the basement as their discussion area.

that the Youth Ministry program is also headquartered in that same room in the basement that houses the high school Religious Education classes? So in addition to the occasional dampness and flooding, the efficiency of both groups is compromised by the permanent need for exposed furnishings, files, and storage.

that there are 73 Confirmation candidates – 22 whose parents rely on a space in the Church (not at home) for instruction? As such, those children and their teachers are crowded into the Conference Room (across from the restrooms) that also houses unrelated equipment and supplies for other ministries and activities?

that when a group uses the Youth Room in the basement and there is a funeral or wedding occurring in the Church (and this has happened), the attendees obviously cannot interrupt the service to exit the Church? Instead, they must use the emergency exit downstairs, walking up the sometimes muddy hill since there is no sidewalk outside that leads up to the parking lots.

Religious Education, of course, does not just apply to the youth of the parish. Adult Education is just as important and also deserves space of its own. Currently, we use the sanctuary of the Church for the St. Bede Lecture series, which limits the day and times for this type of event, not to mention the relative uncertainty of space for other ministries such as Bible Study, Life of the Spirit seminars, parent preparation classes for First Penance and First Communion, and the RCIA program. All of these classes take place either in the one and only conference room across from the rest rooms, or at the Parish Center on Harrison St. which requires constant juggling of schedules that may conflict with the needs of Social Ministry or Catholic Campus Ministry.

Did you know

that we have hundreds of books to offer parishioners but no space to store or display them in what typically would be called a Parish Library?

that there have been many requests for a pre-kindergarten program, and a "Children's Liturgy of the Word" program (when the children at Mass leave for liturgy readings geared to their level)? These programs will never be instituted unless space becomes available.

Some parishes have schools to house their educational needs. Others have built facilities with multi-purpose rooms – tables and chairs used by children and adults for a variety of educational purposes. The Around One Table Committee has visited 5 different churches (Catholic and Protestant) to evaluate how other communities of Christians have solved their needs for providing religious education. The move to Walsingham 15 years ago was, at the time, supposed to be only a temporary solution to the inadequate space problems created by a growing parish. The compromises that parents and their children have had to make during this time have long exceeded the patience that we, as a parish, have demanded of them. There are countless other examples of educational inadequacies existing at St. Bede. But, more importantly, imagine the

potential that exists for educational programming for children *and* adults that, given additional space, could become a reality in a parish with such a dynamic and vibrant population.

Next up – Key Element No. 2 **Space for Fellowship and Social Activities**. Comments or questions? Contact the AOT Committee on the website or fronheiserVA@verizon.net