

Around One Table – Expanding Our Home

St. Bede Parish Continues the Journey Forward

(This is the 2nd report in this series. Report No. 1 can be found on the website)

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. 2 Space for Fellowship and Social Activities

The Church at St. Bede is well known to all parishioners because we see it on a regular basis. Routinely we admire the grounds on the way into Church, pass through the Commons, and worship at Mass in the nave. Periodically, we may also attend a meeting in the conference room, use the nursery, visit a priest in his office, or socialize with fellow parishioners at a reception. For the most part, these activities may seem to give the impression that all is well on the Ironbound campus. The Church building is meeting the needs of the Parish as the staff and the work of many volunteers assure that these activities are successful and available. However, consider the following:

Did you know.....

that the Commons was only meant to be a gathering area before and after Mass? Its use as an area for receptions of 300-400 people (or quasi parish hall) has evolved only out of demand for these types of events.

that the kitchen was modeled as a residential, not commercial, kitchen? The stove, refrigerator, and dishwasher are all like the ones you have at home. The refrigerator, comparatively speaking, is so small that food purchases can only be made on the day of an event and extra large food trays cannot be accommodated - so keeping multiple items cool for any period of time is impossible.

that clean-up of the kitchen after any event takes the volunteers much longer than it should since only so many people can fit into the space – using a sink that is similar to what is found in an average size home?

that the Lenten soup suppers offer grilled cheese sandwiches to as many as 200 or more parishioners- cooked with limited counter space on two home model portable electric grilles?

that some caterers in the Williamsburg area have refused to cater events at St. Bede because of the limited facilities in the kitchen?

These examples focus primarily on the inadequacies of the kitchen. But elsewhere, there are countless examples of space limitations that affect many other ministries and limit the potential for other types of fellowship to occur that many Catholic churches (and perhaps a former parish of many who have moved here) would otherwise consider to be routine.

Did you know

that before most weddings, our Pastor has to vacate his office so that the bride has a place for final and private preparations?

that in the current 'cloak room' (did you even know there is one?) you will also find portable chair racks, hanging table cloths taking up more than half the space reserved for coats, wheelchairs, and other seasonal and education supplies since there is no other place to store them?

that the only conference room (next to the south entrance and the nursery) is so small that its table cannot accommodate the members of either the Pastoral Council or the Around One Table Committee all at one time?

that there is no designated space for our music liturgy program? There is no storage space, no vesting room, and no rehearsal area for the Adult Chorale, Ensemble Singers, Youth Ensemble, Adult and Children's hand bell choirs, and all of us are exposed to their necessity to warm-up before Mass right in front of the congregation.

that in the Parish office, the pastor's secretary now must perform her sometimes confidential tasks and sensitive conferencing in the same room that houses the copier and all other office support equipment, making routine access by other ministries and visitors difficult?

that a dozen tables and a hundred or so chairs, used during receptions and other events, are jammed into the one and only storage closet near the Commons so tightly, it is difficult to get them in and out on a routine basis?

Fellowship and community are fundamental words that reflect optimum Stewardship opportunities. Sharing meals, being able to offer more than just donated baked goods and beverages at funeral receptions, being able to hold more than one meeting at a time for differing ministerial interests – all were intended in the initial One Table plan but have not been able to be implemented. The "wish list" articulated by many parishioners over the years has included parish dinners, holiday and religious seasonal events, more meeting space, and the opportunity to hear lectures and presentations without having to disrupt the sanctuary and sit in Church pews.

These shortcomings should not reflect on the inadequacies of the Church itself. Parishioners and tourists from around the nation and the world are always commenting favorably on the worship space and its conduciveness to celebrating very reverent and impressive liturgies. But all Churches need ancillary space to insure the completeness of the Catholic experience for parishioners of *all* ages. St Bede, thanks to the vision and generosity of its parishioners, now worships at One Table. The next expansion phase needs to address what happens "Around" that Table.

Next up – Key element No. 3 **The Problems Associated with Functioning as a Two Campus Parish.** Comments or questions? Contact the AOT Committee on the website or fronheiserVA@verizon.net