

SPRING 2022 UPDATES



SAINT PETER CATHOLIC PARISH ✦ SCHOOL

As we enter into the spring and continue our 2022 Lenten journey, there are many ways the Lord is blessing us here at St. Peter Parish. Over the past 15 years, our parish and school has faced adversity and grown stronger, continuing the more than 170 years of Catholic life and more than 165 years of Catholic education in our parish. Each parishioner and the many pastors of this parish have had an important role in that history of God's grace being at work here in Ashton.

Since arriving at St. Peter, I have seen the many ways that the St. Peter Parish Community continues to grow – lessons and ways of life handed down from one generation to the next. In the midst of it all there is a spirit of gratitude among parishioners young and old, new and well-established, for what we have received and a responsibility to honor those many gifts. Most recently this was evident when our parish needed a new well to have drinkable water. Everyone came together to raise the money and take care of the tasks necessary to finish the project and keep our parish living its mission – to live and share our faith, to serve the Lord and one another.

The past few years have been very fruitful for our parish – while many parishes and areas of Catholic life are shrinking, our parish is growing. Many new parishioners have found a home in the pews at St. Peter, and our school has increased from 12 students over a decade ago to at least 86 students for next school year. Everyone has had a hand in this growth – from those who have offered many prayers over the last 165 years for our parish and school, to those who have enrolled children, offered financial support, and maintained the buildings and grounds well. The parishioners, school families, benefactors, religious sisters, and priests have all done so much to make and keep our school an authentically Catholic school that forms children to know, love, and serve Jesus Christ. We have so much to be thankful for!

Our parish has a bright and promising future also. We are in the midst of a global cultural shift for the ages, and our parish and school offer an antidote to the trials, sufferings, and persecutions that our broken world is forcing upon us. Our faith gives us a clear invitation to embrace and engage in the trials of our times. With faith, hope, and love we are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. The fruits of this are clearly seen in the growth that we have had over the last 15 years. Now is the time to honor the faith and sacrifices of the past by prudentially planning for the future of our parish.

There are also some updates to our parish organization – namely Pastoral Council – which have been prompted by our diocesan initiative to know, live, and spread our faith in Jesus Christ. This diocese-wide effort is called 'Go Make Disciples' and is happening at every parish in the Diocese of Madison. I am very excited about what the Lord has done and is doing in our parish. Please see next week's bulletin for an update about this initiative and how we're responding.

When I arrived at St. Peter, there were plans that had been drawn up to address a number of the community needs in our parish buildings. In 2019, ADA doors were funded and installed in the Church, which is a huge blessing to our parishioners and visitors who otherwise would not be able to easily access our parish church. We have also replaced the aging and compromised well, made repairs to the rectory to keep it in good order, replaced the unsafe floors in the school, and are in the final stages of updating the St. Peter Community Room (Connector) with new carpeting, office spaces, storage and furniture. It has taken the efforts and generosity of our whole community, and the Lord's blessings, to address these needs in our parish.

Recently, it has become clear that the sound system in the church is broken and is in need of replacement. Our school building also has a growing list of challenges. The greatest of these are limited space and limited accessibility. We are currently looking at all options for addressing these needs, as well as ensuring that our solution is best for the long-term future of our parish. As Catholics we think in centuries, not decades. Please see the section of this letter regarding our school for more details on our plans for the short-term, and how we're going to work as a parish to formulate a plan to honor generations past by planning for generations to come.

SOUND SYSTEM FOR THE CHURCH

Since I have arrived at St. Peter, many parishioners have mentioned that our sound system makes it hard to hear clearly. When we have tried to turn up the volume or adjust the other settings, there is feedback, distortion, or other quality issues that make it more difficult to understand what is being said or sung. After having the issues looked into, we have identified a number of critical issues with our current sound system.

- The speaker that is currently above the sanctuary is only able to project sound to the middle section of the church. This is not a new defect in the speaker, but the design of the current speaker will not permit adequate sound to go to the front and back pews. The speaker cone, which projects the sound, seems to be damaged. This causes vibrations when the volume is above a certain level, which results in poor sound quality and limits amplification.
- Our choir loft sound inputs suffer from feedback due to issues with the cabling from the choir loft to the main sound system input. The damage is severe enough that we are not able to give almost any amplification to the musicians.
- Two of the four microphones we use in the church are wireless. Due to the design of our church the signals from these microphones are often not able to reach the receivers in the sacristy, leading to under-powered or unclear sound. These microphones can also be difficult for the readers to use due to the variety of their designs and complex functionality.
- The technology that was available when our sound system was installed (likely in the mid-1980's or early 1990's from available parish records), while an improvement at the time, has been far surpassed in the last 30-40 years. Current technology and improvements in sound system design will greatly increase a parishioner's listening experience, especially for those who are hard of hearing.

We have had two different contractors look at repairing the known issues. Both technicians have said that, even if the repairs we could do were completed, the remainder of the issues we have will not go away because of the limitations of our current sound system equipment. Given all these factors, and the increasing number of parishioners who struggle to hear due normal, age-related hearing problems, we have opted to replace the current sound system. This has been done with the approval and encouragement of the parish finance council members.

- The new sound system will utilize multiple speakers, which can be digitally tuned to make sure the sound is most appropriate for our church design. This includes the ability to best account for the challenges of plaster walls that reflect sound more noticeably. These speakers will be placed at standing/seating height to direct the sound to the listener's ears, while being placed in the least obtrusive locations possible. A new set of speakers hung above the sanctuary to be able to direct the sound to the pews that are not reached by the wall-mounted speakers so that parishioners in every pew will have the best experience possible. Compact sub-woofers will also be added, which help give a depth of sound so that the listener can experience better clarity.
- The choir loft will have its own dedicated microphones and controls, which are connected with quality cables to make sure the sound is best transmitted to the main speaker system.
- We will retain a number of our current microphones, while also upgrading from wireless to hard-wired microphones in certain locations so that the quality is clear, and the readers and clergy can easily use them.
- Unlike our current system, the new sound system will be expandable so that new technology can be integrated in the future. This will keep future upgrade costs down and allow us flexibility for the future. This will also include provisions for a hearing-aid or hearing-assist system that could be added in the future at minimal expense.
- The new sound system will provide a better listening experience for all parishioners, and is especially intended to help those who have difficulty hearing to do so more easily.

We have contracted with Peak Audio Systems, based out of Reedsburg, WI, to provide the equipment and installation of our new system. We did consider other contractors for this project, but through our research and inquiry with other local parishes, found that other companies could not offer the quality, community satisfaction, and support that Peak Audio Systems does. Peak Audio Systems has advised us that with shipping

delays, it will take about eight months to receive all the equipment before installation can be completed, barring any further delays that may come up due to global factors. The total cost for the system will be \$46,270. Funds will be raised through this year's Benefit Dinner. While this may sound like a large number, this is consistent with bids from other reputable contractors and is similar in cost for equivalent new sound systems in other parish churches like ours. Please do not hesitate to contact me, trustees Steve Roudebush and Dan Noltner, or any other finance council members with questions about the plans for our new system.

2022-2023 SCHOOL YEAR AND LONG-TERM PLANS

Enrollment in the school has consistently increased over the past 10-15 years. We are now slated to have at least 86 students enrolled next year, and likely more as the next school year approaches. This increase in enrollment has put a strain on our current building capacity. Decades ago, while nuns were still teaching in our beloved school, there were no legal limits on students per square foot or ratios of students per teacher. This has changed and the state now has requirements for both of these metrics. Our current school building overall is close to reaching a maximum capacity, and has reached a maximum capacity in some grades. Further, we are utilizing our space to a degree which is starting to have negative impacts on the quality of our education. For instance, in the library there are often students visiting to check out books, support staff meeting with students, and the principal meeting with a small group, all at the same time, in a space no bigger than an average house's single bedroom. This is to say nothing of the 25 or more students in Pre-K who have to nap in various spaces because there is not enough floor space for them to all be in one place. Just last week a student was not feeling well and the only place for them to rest was on the floor under some cabinets in the school office. The school hall is another area that hosts multiple activities throughout the day – oftentimes having band lessons, lunch, and indoor recess all happening simultaneously – which sounds like a great way to get a massive headache!

All of this presents a welcome challenge – our school is growing and healthy, but we need to form a cohesive and well thought-out plan for the future. Formulating a plan was actually one of the school accreditation goals from 2017, that has yet to be addressed. However, Deacon Pipitone, the Pastoral Council, and school staff have begun formulating how we will respond to the needs of our growing community.

We are still enrolling for all grades, Pre-Kindergarten (3 years old and up) through Eighth Grade. Right now we do not have enough enrollment to start a middle school class (6th-8th grade), however we are still enrolling. Please spread the word to family and friends about this opportunity. We have a great blessing in having a principal that has taught and supervised middle school grades, and we have a number of promising applicants for the teaching position, should we have the students. Even if we do not have enough students for middle school this next year, we do plan to offer this program in the 2023-24 school year. Please be advocates for our parish and school, and invite families to send their sixth through eighth grade students to enroll. Scholarships and school tours are available.

This next year, with increasing enrollment from this year, we see the need for additional space already. We have looked at many options with the Building and Grounds Commission, Pastoral Council, and Finance Council. Time is running short to prepare for next year, and we have made a prudential decision with both a short term and long term plans to address our challenges. In the short term, we are planning to place at least one temporary, modular building, about the size of a double wide mobile home, in front of the school. We will lease or purchase this modular building, depending on what is available and most financially prudent. This temporary modular building will have two classrooms, bathrooms, and a heating/air-conditioning system. This will allow us to have adequate space for our current enrollment, and give us some flexibility to make a proper and thorough assessment of what to do long-term. We have heard many suggestions and ideas on how we could utilize more of our existing building space for educational purposes. Unfortunately, there are many legal requirements for school educational spaces and these options either do not fit these requirements, or are cost prohibitive.

As I mentioned before, we Catholics think and plan for centuries, not decades. Since Jesus founded His one Church on St. Peter, our beloved patron and intercessor, we have carried the good news of forgiveness in Christ, Redemption and Resurrection, and the message that brings hope to all people that God loves them and desires to be in communion with them. At St. Peter in little Ashton, we have been entrusted with this same responsibility and mission. The families of this parish have understood for over 170 years that we are

to bless those here presently, and those in the future by the decisions we make now. We are recipients of those blessings in our beautiful church, vibrant school, peaceful cemetery, and our welcoming park and ball field. More recently, a new parish rectory and community room were built in the 1990's to address the needs of the parish community. We are at a moment in the history of our parish to discern again how the Lord is calling us to meet our current and future needs as a parish with a growing school. The temporary classrooms are meant to give us time and space to plan. We are still determining the exact location for this structure, but it will be located somewhere near the school so we can tie into the existing electrical and plumbing infrastructure, as required by state and local law.

We have begun talking with our parishioner and staff leadership, and have taken steps to begin the planning process for the future of our parish and school, especially addressing the limitation of our current facilities. This has included getting some initial proposals for adequate space in our school, under the direction of the Diocese of Madison Office of Catholic School and with the blessing of Bishop Hying. The next step in the process is to conduct a feasibility study, which will determine the extent of our need for space based on local demographic predictions, parishioner support, and many other factors. We have partnered with the Steier Group, a consulting firm who specializes in this type of planning, and works with many Catholic institutions. They are currently working with a number of diocesan parishes to conduct similar feasibility studies and assistance in planning. I have spoken with other local priests and the Steier Group comes highly recommended. This May and June there will be significant opportunities for parishioners to offer input for this study through surveys, questionnaires, and personal interviews. Your input and feedback is needed, and I ask every parishioner to participate when those opportunities are offered.

We are hopeful to plan for the space for our community to gather, for families and children to be educated as students and formed as disciples, to provide access for those with accessibility needs, and to continue to sustain and grow our parish and school.

2022 BENEFIT DINNER UPDATE

As you know we have been working to provide an opportunity to build community while also raising funds for the needs of our parish and school by hosting a benefit dinner: Hearts on Fire for Jesus. Although it was the hope to continue the evening event as in the past, it is evident that this is no longer a sustainable and viable option: there has been limited support and attendees of parishioners outside school families, the cost of the venue to host the event has grown, and the event is has often been seen as an opportunity to acquire prizes and auction items, rather than a fundraising opportunity to sustain the infrastructure and programs offered for the benefit of the parish and school.

Therefore, after consulting with a variety of parishioners and the event committee members, we have decided to shift to a new paradigm. The Hearts on Fire Benefit Dinner will now be held at St. Peter School in the school hall. Father Chris and Deacon Michael will be providing the dinner – a menu and updated program will be available soon. Since the food will be prepared in house, seating is limited to 100 attendees. As noted, we will still have a variety of auction and raffle items available. Although the ticket price remains the same, the dinner will include drink tickets and a five-course meal. While we hope to see you there, due to this change, if you would like to have a refund for your already purchased tickets please contact the parish or school office.

We are sorry for the inconvenience and change in plans, however, it seems to be the prayerfully prudent decision.

Moving forward in the 2022-2023 academic year it is our hope that you would be able to join us with developing our parish and school in a couple of key fundraisers. Next year we will be once again offering six fish fries, as well as fall and spring bingo events Please see the list of these events listed in the box to the right.

FISH FRIES (4:30-7:30 PM) **Carry-out & Dine-in Buffet**

October 21, 2022
November 11, 2022
February 10, 2023
February 24, 2023
March 10, 2023
March 24, 2023

BINGO NIGHTS (5-9 PM)

October 7, 2022
April 28, 2023

OUR PAST, OUR FUTURE: ALL ARE GOD'S BLESSINGS

There are so many signs that the Lord is blessing our parish community. Not only have we seen growth in those attending Mass and participating in parish activities, we have a consistently growing parish school that is regarded by many as one of the best schools in the Diocese of Madison. This gives me great hope – as many parishes are struggling to have activity and signs of vitality – the Lord has blessed us in these ways abundantly. The future at St. Peter is bright. Bishop Hying has commented many times that he sees how there is great Catholic life here. We can confidently look to the future, while many parishes and institutions are questioning their long-term future viability, we can confidently plan for the centuries to come. This is due to the sacrifices of the many parishioners who have come before us – their faith, hard work, and financial support have all paved the way for our future. Now is our time to make those same sacrifices – faith, hard work, and financial support. With God's abundant blessings we can honor the sacrifices of the past and pave the way for centuries of faith at St. Peter Parish.

As always, please feel free to contact either of us with any questions.

In Christ,



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May the Lord continue to guide and bless all of our Parishioners and every work of our Parish. To support the work of St. Peter Parish consider donating at the link below.

www.ashtoncatholic.org/donate

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