Consider this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one should give according to what he has prayerfully decided, not grudgingly nor under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

(2 Corinthians 9/6-7)

The Initial Vision: Building a Field of Dreams on Fellowship Road

Shortly after Saint Elizabeth Church was formally established in July of 2000, the newly-appointed pastor, Fr. Thomas Mullin, and a team of more than 100 interested parishioners began developing a vision and plan to create a Field of Dreams on a 36-acre property on the corner of Fellowship Road and Pottstown Pike. The comprehensive architectural design completed in late 2002, includes a full set of parish facilities: a church building, an education center with a parish elementary school, a parish ministry center, a gymnasium and a rectory.

Through the great generosity of parishioners between 2001 and 2010, the church and education center (Phase I) were completed in 2005-2006; the parish ministry center and the gymnasium (Phase II) were completed in 2010. The total cost to complete the construction and furnishing of all these facilities between 2003 and 2010 was $23.5 million! Parishioners responded with inspiring generosity to two parish-wide capital campaigns: A Time to Build (2001-2006) and Stepping Forward Together (2008-2010), ultimately contributing close to $15 million in campaign funds to the two major building projects.

To complete Phase I, the parish took on two mortgages totaling $7.5 million: one with the Archdiocese for the church construction and the other, with a commercial lender (now WSFS) for the education center. In 2010, the parish successfully funded Phase II, a $5 million construction project for the gymnasium and ministry center, without incurring any additional debt.

Since the completion of Phase I in 2006, the parish has consistently made full payment on the monthly and/or quarterly debt service, and has already made two advanced mortgage payments in the total amount of close to $240,000 to reduce its overall indebtedness. As of June 30, 2015, total parish indebtedness stands at $5,428,644.12.

Completing the Vision: Building an Onsite Residence for Priests

In the late fall of 2014, the pastor introduced exploratory discussions about the construction of an onsite rectory which would complete the original design of campus facilities first developed and approved back in 2003. The proposal was initiated in conjunction with a joint recommendation from the Pastoral, Finance and Stewardship Councils that the pastor formally request of the Archbishop the assignment of an additional full-time priest to the parish staff.

Throughout the intervening months, the parish administrative staff, and the three councils all discussed the proposal to construct an onsite residence for priests. The structure is being called a residence for priests rather than a rectory, since it does not include office space for everyday parish operations, which will continue to be conducted in the existing parish ministry center. The decision to initiate the project was announced to parishioners through the parish bulletins on
Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday (March 29 and April 4, 2015).
The residence for priests will be located in the same area of the parish property as initially delineated by the KCBA architects back in 2003; that is, in the southeast corner of the property. While the initial schematic design envisioned a rectory of some 7,500 square feet, the proposed residence is just under 4,000 square feet. The structure will be smaller than a more typical rectory where both parish offices and priests’ living quarters are combined.

Throughout the spring and summer, parish staff have been working with Southdown Homes of Downingtown to complete a building design, draw up the construction documents and finalize a total project cost. After considering several standard housing models, the team settled upon the Bellingham Farmhouse as most readily adaptable at reasonable expense to accommodate the needs of a residence for priests. The current floor plan includes second floor suites (sitting room, bedroom and bath) for two full-time resident priests; two guest rooms, one on the first floor and another on the second floor; and a small study for occasional pastoral care calls outside normal office hours.

The building design and construction budget were reviewed and approved by the Archdiocesan Building Committee and the College of Consultors at the end of May. Some work has already begun to prepare utility connections for the site, linking the gas, electric, telecommunications, water and sewer lines with the existing parish utility lines. Once the construction contract has been finalized and approved, actual building construction will begin and should be completed within four to six months, pending weather conditions, etc.

**Funding the Project: The Bring It Home One-Time Gift Appeal**

Although there are a couple of variable costs still to be specified, the anticipated project cost for the design and construction of the onsite residence for priests is between $725,000 and $750,000. The parish aims to fund the project without incurring any additional debt. The primary funding source is a one-time gift appeal entitled Bring It Home, being conducted between September and December of 2015. As needed, proceeds from the sale of the existing rectory in Glenmoore sometime in 2016 will be used to cover the cost of the project. Following the recommendation of the three parish councils, any funds raised in the Bring It Home appeal over and above what is needed to finance the construction of the onsite residence, together with the sale of the current rectory, will be directed to advanced payments on the existing parish debt.

The Bring It Home parish-wide, one-time gift appeal is being inaugurated at weekend Masses on September 19-20. In advance of the formal introduction of the campaign, Fr. Mullin invited close to 300 major parish donors to help “set the pace” for the Bring It Home appeal by making a one-time contribution in whatever amount their current circumstances allow, payable by the end of the year. The aggregate amount of the pacesetter gifts is being used as a “challenge gift” to motivate other parishioners to match the monies donated by those who contribute in the pacesetter phase.

In mid-September, a specific appeal letter from the pastor is being sent to those more recently-registered parishioners and others who did not participate in the first two building campaigns, encouraging to help match the pacesetters’ gift total with a one-time gift of their own, payable by the end of the year. In addition, a general appeal letter from the pastor is being sent in late September to all registered parishioners not already participating in the Bring It Home appeal, encouraging their commitment to a one-time contribution, also payable by the end of the year.

Questions about this project may be directed to Rev. Thomas M. Mullin at 610-321-1200 or tmullin@stelizabethparish.org.