



# THE FEAST OF PENTECOST

*May 20, 2018*

*Church of Saint Thomas the Apostle*

**I**t was five years ago at this time – May of 2013 – when I learned that I'd been appointed pastor at Saint Thomas the Apostle in Southwest Minneapolis. And so, I drove over to 44th and Washburn and discovered a remarkable thing: there was already a church here! A great big beautiful church with a full gymnasium underneath and a gathering space out front.

There was a school building with a social hall and classrooms that also served for faith formation programs... On the other side of the church, I found a handsome structure that had originally been built as a rectory; it now serves as offices and meeting space for parish staff.

These things were already in place! I didn't have to build them! ...Praise the Lord!...Praise the Lord.

As I ventured into the parish a little more deeply, I discovered a community that prayed together beautifully – that sang and worshipped with great intentionality and care. I found faith formation programs that engage disciples of all ages from the smallest of children...to the oldest of adults. I found a school that was thriving – where our children are formed in the love of Jesus Christ... every single day. I found parishioners who were visiting the homebound, bringing them communion, others who were serving meals to the hungry and sheltering people who were homeless. I found this faith-filled church community that was already in place; I didn't have to create it.

And guess what? ...Neither did you...

There's not one person sitting in this church today who was here when this parish began in 1908. There's not one person (I'm pretty sure) sitting in this church today who was here in 1925 when this building and the school next door were built...All of us are heirs to those who went before us – those who made tremendous sacrifices to build up this community of faith – to erect these buildings and to provide ministries that bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to this time and place... We are heirs to their benevolence – we are stewards of what's been passed on to us.

And hopefully... we are good stewards.

In 2015, as many of you know, our parish engaged in a process of strategic planning called Faith in Our Future. We looked at our ministries; we examined our values and priorities, our facilities and our dreams. We laid out a plan that envisioned refinements –improvements – all across our parish life.

Many of those improvements have already been implemented. We've beefed up our ministries; we've hired additional staff; we've rolled out a new parish identity and public face.

And also, since that time, we've been working to examine closely these facilities that were passed on to us – this church and school that are now 93 years old and this parish center that's served us for 60 years.



We did numerous consultations with parishioners. We formed a committee made of up of members who have expertise in the fields of commercial construction and facilities management. We hired Opus Design Build to bring in engineers and contractors to help us understand what's needed and what those things are likely to cost.

We found that our heating systems...are original (nearly 100 years old). They're on their last legs and are being held together with parts cannibalized from other antique boilers. We found that our plumbing is literally crumbling, and in some cases, totally plugged up. If you cut a piece of pipe (supply pipe or drainage pipe) and hold it up to the light, you can't see through it because it's so calcified that it looks like a solid mass.

Many of you know that we've had to abandon some fixtures in our school restrooms because we can't fix them until we rip out all the walls, jack-hammer up the floors and replace the pipes from beginning to end.

We have windows whose wooden frames have rotted here in the church and in the northeast tower.

If you look at the bricks over the windows in our school, you'll see that the masonry is crumbling.

We've got water coming in through those walls.

We have inadequate electrical service – too few outlets in our classrooms – and some places where we're still using a fuse box rather than circuit breakers.

When the rains are heavy, the drainage from our front lawn flows toward the building, and we get water coming into a new mechanical room that was added twenty years ago...

Some things we've already addressed. We replaced the roof on the boiler room. We replaced the roof on the tower. We repaired the roof on the church. We installed a new security system in all of our buildings. We put in new telephones and Wi-Fi. But now it's time to address the bigger issues – the more expensive issues – the things we need to make right for ourselves... and for future generations.

Some of you have been giving to our "boiler fund" for years. I'm happy to tell you that those contributions have all been preserved. We have over \$200,000 in that boiler fund. That's the good news. The bad news is that it'll cost more than a million dollars to upgrade our heating system for the church and school alone. Altogether, we have more than three million dollars' worth of projects that have to be done.

Roofs and windows, tuckpointing and plumbing, electrical and toilets – none of these are terribly exciting things, but, I can tell you that, if they don't work... we'd all be pretty miserable.

It has to be done. As I said, we're literally holding some of things together with duct tape... and prayer. And after 93 years of service... it's time for them to be replaced or upgraded.

And so, a few months ago, a committee of parishioners with expertise in the field of fundraising evaluated several professional firms who could help us conduct a capital campaign to raise the money we'll need. We've hired the Steier Group, which has an outstanding reputation doing this work with parishes across the Twin Cities... and across the country.



Next month, a campaign manager will begin work here at Saint Thomas the Apostle. She'll spend several weeks conducting a study to understand our parishioners' expectations and ability to give. Then, we'll start asking for gifts in the late summer and continue an extensive capital campaign throughout the fall, wrapping up... before Christmas.

Hopefully, that will allow us to undertake some of these most urgent projects next summer and additional projects... in the years to come. There'll be lots more information coming about this effort. But today – on this Feast of Pentecost – this time when we celebrate the birth of the church – I think it's appropriate for us to give thanks for those who went before us.

We give thanks for those apostles who received the Holy Spirit and went out to preach the Gospel. With the exception of only one, all of them were martyred for the faith – they made the ultimate sacrifice, and we are part of that communion of saints with them – heirs to the faith they passed on to us.

We give thanks for the people who've gone before us here at Saint Thomas the Apostle – parishioners long gone, and parishioners here today who've been around for 20, 30, 40, 50 years or more, who've built up this community of faith – who built the facilities that we enjoy today. Think about that! ... Think about what we owe to them... We are part of that communion of saints as well...

Four years ago, I was sifting through some old things that were in storage in the parish center when I came across a chalice; it's sitting there on the altar today... I turned it over and saw inscribed on the bottom: Rev. J. Cleary, Dec. 25, 1917...

Father Cleary was pastor of Saint Thomas the Apostle from 1918 to 1954. He was pastor here when this church and this school were built in 1925. That chalice is a link in this communion of saints to which we belong. It was used to celebrate the Eucharist at Saint Thomas by those who sacrificed to build these facilities.

And for the next six months or so (during this capital campaign)... we'll be using it as well. It's a visible sign of our communion with those folks – a sacrament of what we've inherited from them and what we seek to pass on.

I pray that those of us who call this community home in 2018 will prove to be worthy heirs of all that's been passed on to us.

  
*Father Michael Reding*