

## Our Tradition of Excellence

Dear Friends,

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow. You know what that means! Yet there are signs of change everywhere. A new Archbishop was appointed on Feb 9<sup>th</sup>. We celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes on February 11<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Super bowl on the 13<sup>th</sup> and Valentine's Day on the 14<sup>th</sup>! Signs of Spring are beginning to emerge. The new growth helps us recall the milestones of our collective past together as members of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish!

- OLOL dedicated - December 1950 - Masses held in school.
- OLOL Parish School – September, 1950 with 224 students.
- Convent for the Ursuline Sisters built in 1955
- Current Church built in 1963 and the Rectory in 1971
- Monsignor Tony Gerst's ministry ends, after 27 years as the first pastor under whose lengthy ministry, the parish completed six successful building programs.
- Parish Life Center was built and dedicated in the 1990's, during Fr. Oz's ministry, along with the remodeling of the church and parish school.

While we had no way of knowing just how the current health crisis - pandemic - would impact and literally change everything, what we do know is that the impact has been widespread and it will likely take years of research and review to fully realize the scope of impact and significance this crisis has had on everyone and everything.

At OLOL, we have been forced to get very creative in how we live, how we gather to celebrate the Mass, as well as how our students attend and learn in our Blue-ribbon school.

We have worked together for more than three decades being responsible stewards, or managers, of the good gifts God gives to each of us as well as the challenges life sometimes presents to us. Have we flawlessly managed the challenges this health crisis has presented?

Perhaps not flawlessly, but we have done our best to meet these challenges, adapt our ministry, and teaching techniques. The last 2 years have not been easy but our parish and parish school are not only surviving but thriving.

- While mass attendance has not returned to normal levels, we began streaming our 9:30 mass to ease anxiety of parishioners about not worshipping in our space.
- School enrollment – We have successfully expanded our Pre-k program to almost double which will help secure steady enrollment in the next few years.

But, with you, I pray with hope that the health crisis will subside this year. Whether it does or not, however, our lives must go on. Our parish's ministry, as well as our parish school, must go on, too.

You may recall that just before the pandemic erupted that shut down everything, we started to address the needs and facility challenges we have long faced at OLOL. Among other things, we hosted an "Open Forum" where all parish families were invited to reflect on our needs and join with us in making future plans for the parish and parish school. Issues like:

- Bereavement ministry: not having a place on campus to host meals
- State of the art school: Is our school facility competitive to attract students?
- Security: How do we best secure our school and parking lot during school hours?

To renew this conversation, I consulted with the parish and school staffs and reached out to JRA Architects to look at, in a professional way, the space needs of our parish and school. With JRA's assistance, I feel that we have developed an exciting plan for the future of the parish. These plans include ideas that address both the needs of parish ministry and the school, which is the largest ministry of the parish. The plan has been divided into 3 phases.

The first phase will include building a 1-story addition to the existing building, where administrative offices will be moved. This addition will include an extended entrance with a more secure entrance for both students and visitors. This relocation will allow the current office space to be renovated and used for modern maker spaces and STEM rooms. Much needed restrooms will be added on both the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors. While the second floor will receive most of the remodeling work, the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor will receive a refresh that includes better insulation and HVAC work. The cafeteria kitchen will also be remodeled as part of this phase.

In Phase 2, we will begin to address space needs for our bereavement ministry. To achieve this, a new parish office building will be built on the front portion of the campus that will include a large multi-functional room with a kitchenette. This space will also double for adult educational/formational functioning. This building will be attached to the church via walkways with easy access to both buildings. For greater access to this space and the church, additional parking will be added so that daily mass participants will have closer parking to avoid driving to the back of campus. By creating separation from church and school, our buildings will be more secure and the main parking lot will be closed to outside traffic, securing our "outdoor classroom" from neighborhood cut-through traffic.

Phase 3 will address other space needs for organizations that meet regularly on the campus. The current Parish Center would house permanent meeting spaces for Youth Ministry, Knights of Columbus, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, among others. The concessions stand and pavilion concept will be re-addressed as well.

Early JRA estimates are that this plan will cost between \$3.2M and \$3.6M. While that may be a huge financial challenge, we have already received about \$800,000 from the estate of Mary Alice Lawler. Further, given the good management of the resources parishioners have entrusted to OLOL, we have managed to save through the school and parish legacy funds \$400K. What this means, therefore, when added together, the parish and parish school would need to raise an additional \$2M to \$2.5M in a 3-year capital campaign to fully fund our proposed project.

Therefore, I've been asking myself lately, and now I am asking you, "Where do we go from here?" How do we move forward in preparing our parish to celebrate the 75th anniversary and beyond? Is now the time to conduct a capital campaign, raising the needed financial resources to update facilities and prepare for the anniversary and the next 75-years of ministry?

To help us answer this question, the Archdiocese has granted us permission to engage the local parish support firm, Generis-Ashley | Rountree. GAR will conduct a feasibility study for us over the next six to eight weeks. They have assisted many other parishes in our Archdiocese with similar studies and campaigns, some of which have successfully taken place during the pandemic.

We are also hosting a meeting on March 6<sup>th</sup> at 1pm in the church. This meeting will last 59 minutes and will provide an overview of the project, time for you to see preliminary renderings of the project and ask questions. Please come. I think you will be as excited as I am!

Here's what I'm asking you to do.

A few of you will be asked to participate in an interview. Please accept this invitation as it will help shape the process. The entire parish will be asked to complete an online questionnaire making your voice heard as we discern our next steps as a parish.

In spite of the challenges we all have faced, we have much to celebrate and an important ministry to support. As we consider preparing our parish for the 75th anniversary, as well as the next 75-years in ministry, join with me, and with the parish, as we ask and answer the question, "Where do we go from here?"

Sincerely,

Fr. Scott