

We have received a number of inquiries regarding the financial situation at St. John the Divine. I am grateful to Colleen Kelly for her excellent presentation at Tuesday's synodal gathering.

I have also received several inquiries from the "Save Our Church" Committee at St. John the Divine. I must stress that there have been no decisions made to close the church and that conversations with those gathered for the Synod will continue for the next few weeks, after which we will develop a pastoral strategy to guide and direct our Family for the next several years.

We hope to have our financial reports given to the Family within a couple of weeks, but for now it is important for the community to know that St. John the Divine is carrying a debt of just over \$90, 000. As I have been reminded by the Chancery Office, this is unsustainable.

There are also a number of concerns about where the proceeds from the sale of the rectory went and what the renovations to the church cost. I will try to provide those below as accurately and succinctly as possible.

I begin by stating that the hope was to take advantage of the time the church was closed during lockdown. At that time, the team was consulted, as was the Finance Committee and members of the Chancery staff. In retrospect, more engagement could have occurred with the parish as a whole.

Regrettably, there was no Parish Council in place that could have facilitated these conversations, nor did St. John the Divine have a Building Committee.

The most frequent concern brought to me before I arrived was that St. John the Divine was very dark. With the only windows being those on the west of the building, there was little natural light in the church. The chapel, choir, and altar areas each had a skylight, but minimal light was allowed in through them due to their positioning and placement.

Prior to my arrival, there was already work being done on the lights. On one of my first visits to the church, I discovered Jason Howlett and a former staff member of St. John the Divine using scaffolding to assess what work was needed. This was done under the direction of Father Jasica.

With the church being closed for most of the pandemic, many probably did not realize that approximately half of the chandeliers in the worship space were non-functional. They required repair, and in some cases, a replacement of the operating system. A new lighting board needed to be installed and having to replace the ballasts and the lights in the hall required additional work on the panels to bring them up to code.

A new track of lighting was installed over the altar to offer a wash of red light on the rear of the apse, creating visual continuity between the altar-table and the enamels of the tabernacle. The cost for the lighting and electrical upgrades was \$44, 862.

To add further "light" to the space, the blue and rose walls were painted in two different shades of white: a brighter white on the walls, and a more muted colour on the panels of the suspended ceiling.

The lighter colours on the wall and ceiling prevent the dark marble furnishings from feeling heavy or oppressive. The hall, meeting room, hallways, offices, and loft received new paint as well. The cost for painting was \$17, 685.

The confessional required immediate repair. There was a large hole in the wall between the last pew in the chapel and the confessional. This meant that no conversations were private, leaving penitents feeling vulnerable. At the same time, the parish secretary shared that she could often hear discussions taking place in the confessional. To remedy this problem, the confessional was rebuilt, closing off the door to the office and adding lighting, insulation, and a ventilation system.

As the work was being done on the confessional, black mold was discovered in the chapel area, requiring the space to be sanitized and recarpeted. Moisture appears to be a long-standing issue on the site. The cost for the confessional was \$9, 153.

Vestments were purchased for the parish from The Holy Rood Guild; they were the least expensive sets that could be purchased, as you can see from the lack of any ornamentation. Any vestments worn by the previous pastor left with him, and the only remaining vestments were the ones that had been altered to fit Father Rocheleau to fit his small stature. The cost for the purchase of vestments was approximately \$10, 000.

As the sacristy was being cleaned and prepared for the resumption of normal services, fecal matter from rodents was discovered in the cupboards which stored the vessels. Those things which could be cleaned were, and some items needed to be buried or burned. It was sad to see. We continue to have someone come monthly for pest control. The cost for monthly pest control is \$46.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal requires that there be one image of Christ crucified by the altar. At the time of activation, there was a large cross on the altar facing the presider, the processional cross, and an image of the risen Christ superimposed on a cross. One could write for some time about the inappropriateness of the confluence of these images, but I made the decision to simplify the space, returning to the original architectural renderings to bring the space in line with liturgical norms and directives. The cross was designed and created by Sunrise Glass of London, Ontario. The cost for the cross was approximately \$2, 000. There was an additional \$1, 000 in engineering fees, as per the Diocese of London.

Arguably, the only unnecessary addition to the worship space was the placement of the statue of St. John the Divine, salvaged from a rood screen from a church in the USA. While “unnecessary,” I believe it is spiritually and pastorally important to highlight the patron of the church and the great cloud of witnesses that has guided and directed our community. The cost for this item was approximately \$5, 000.

To facilitate better sound quality in the church and the livestreaming of our liturgies, new equipment was purchased and installed. The cost for these items was \$12, 745.

The roof on the worship space, meeting rooms, hallway, and office complex was replaced. This cost \$63, 223.

Costs associated with cleaning, repolishing the marble, and junk removal totalled approximately \$2, 800.

The sale of the rectory actualized \$556, 519. The debt in the amount of \$353,883 was serviced, leaving us with a balance of \$203, 636.

The total amount of money spent on repairs and upgrades to the church was \$187, 594 with the remaining balance going to support the purchase of things such as filing cabinets and office chairs.

I will admit that the statue was an unnecessary purchase, or at least one that did not need to take place immediately. Similarly with the cross, while in keeping with liturgical norms, it could have occurred at a later time. I take responsibility for this.

If you have concerns or suggestions, I encourage you to reach out to those attending the Synod. It has proven to be a fertile ground for new ideas and possible solutions.

Sincerely,



Michael Bechard (Rev.)
Pastor