

## Downtown parish kicks off worship space renovation plan

By Emily Morrison

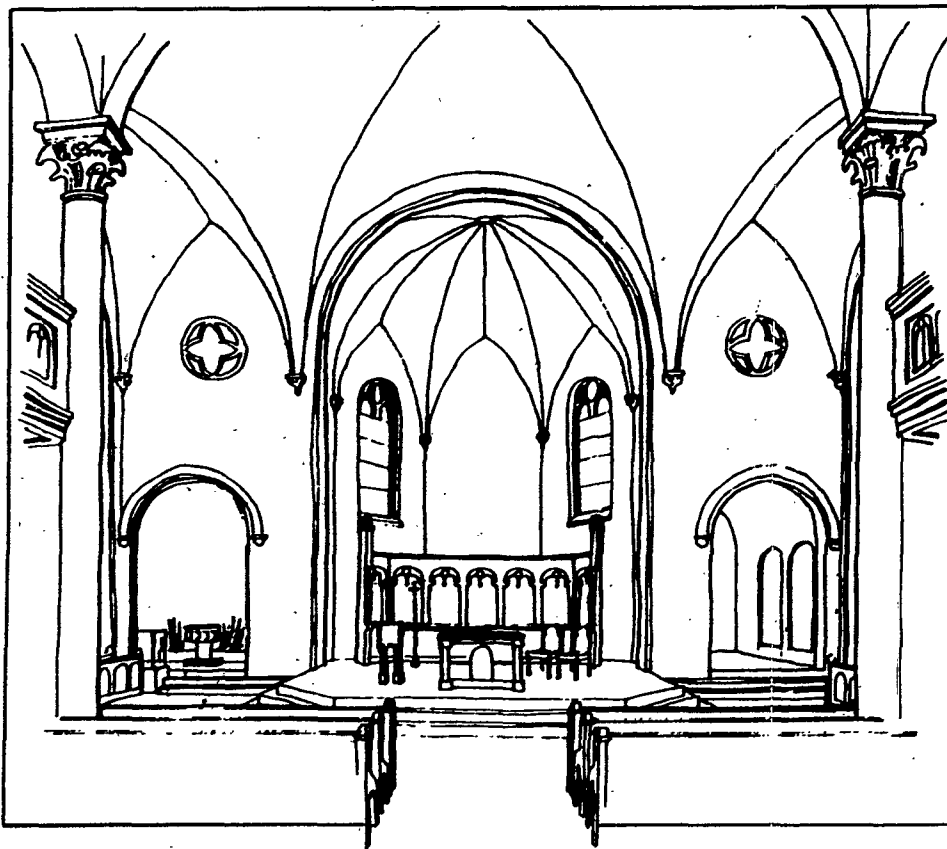
St. Mary's Easter celebration will be the downtown parish's last hurrah — at least for the ensuing four and a half months. The Sunday after Easter, the congregation will "go underground" until September, sharing the worship space of St. Mary's Church of the Deaf on the landmark building's lower level. In the interim, construction will begin on a \$500,000 renovation project intended to preserve church treasures while reconciling the church's liturgical spaces with post-Vatican II guidelines.

Last week's announcement was the culmination of a series of workshops held last summer to achieve a parish-wide consensus on what, if anything, should be done to renovate the interior of the 153-year-old brick, Romanesque Revival structure (see "St. Mary's strives for consensus on interior renovations," C-J, Sept. 4, 1986). By early November, 1986, the church's 600-odd parishioners were able to agree on preliminary sketches drafted by architect Michael Doran.

"The most significant change is that (the church's worship space) is going to be much less cluttered," said Doran last week, at a press conference attended by Mayor Thomas Ryan and several of St. Mary's downtown neighbors. "The furniture is going to be removed in quantity." The sanctuary's high altar will be removed, as well as the elaborate stenciling that currently adorns the building's vaulted ceilings.

Six key points constitute the renovation plan, in addition to repainting, installation of new carpeting and lighting, and alterations that will make the building fully accessible to the handicapped. The current dual-altar construction will be replaced by a single altar, as recommended by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy in its 1978 document on Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. A reredos or backdrop screen will complement the new altar and provide a sense of community, according to architect Doran.

The communion rail and the first row of pews will be taken out, to provide 10 feet of



expanded sanctuary space. What is now the church's Lady chapel will become the Eucharist reservation chapel, a place reserved for private prayer, and a new baptistry will be constructed to the left of the altar, providing more space for musicians to perform at the front of the church.

All aisles will be widened, and pews reworked and refinished. Some pews will be relocated in the transepts to the right and left of the altar area, to provide seating on all three sides. Finally, St. Mary's entryway will be redesigned to form a new gathering space at the rear of the church. Sections from the communion rail will be used to divide the nave or seating area from the redesigned

vestibule area.

Paul Stack, chairman of the parish council and a member of St. Mary's Worship Space Committee, admitted to being a bit apprehensive at first about whether a parish as diverse as St. Mary's would be able to reach a consensus without battle scars from at least a few skirmishes. "I envisioned chaos," he allowed. "But every single member of the community had an opportunity for input, and we were able to work the list (of projected alterations) down to real priorities within the community, and come up with a workable time frame. In essence, not everyone agreed 100 percent, but they did appreciate the opportunity and agree with

the process."

"Parishioners did seem concerned at first with the removal of the high altar," Doran concurred, "but seeing the plans seemed to allay their fears." The architect, who recently won an American Institute of Architects design award for his work on Trinity Covenant Church on South Clinton Avenue, considered the consensus process at St. Mary's "a salutary experience. The congregation was very cooperative, enthusiastic and intensely interested — and therefore, the project had a greater chance of success," he observed.

Father Jim Lawlor, for one, is ecstatic over completion of the project's planning phase and eager to begin the construction period. With donations to date at just over the \$100,000 mark, he concedes that the renovation is a costly venture. The fund raising firm of Development Direction, Inc., has been hired to help with the fund raising process, and a Downtown Advisory Committee headed by Central Trust Bank president Carlos Carballada is soliciting funds within the business community.

At any rate, if construction hasn't been completed by September, several betrothed couples could wind up singing the wedding-bell blues. Father Lawlor, however, remains confident that all October weddings in the church's renewed worship space will proceed to the new single altar right on schedule.

"It seems to me that buildings, like people, have pivotal points in their lives, and this is one of the turning points in the life of this structure," said Father Lawlor at the press conference February 25. "We see St. Mary's as a place that will accommodate the worship of this day as well as the worship of the 21st century."

If future generations of St. Mary's parishioners are to make it into the fold on schedule, then it's high time — as parish consensus specialist Bill Brown of Indiana might have advocated during last summer's worship space meetings — to let the plaster dust fly.



California native George Sanchez will portray the aging peasant Jesus in the upcoming Mercy congregation presentation of *A Peasant of El Salvador*.

### Mercy congregation to present 'A Peasant of El Salvador'

*A Peasant of El Salvador* was inspired perhaps in equal measure by Euripides' *The Bacchae* and the haunting songs of the late Chilean musician Victor Jara. Audience members at the single local performance of the award-winning play March 14 will be moved by the pathos of ancient Greek tragedy as well as by the compelling Central American tragedy of political oppression played out in our own time.

First created and performed by Gould & Stearns, a two-man theater company from Vermont, *A Peasant of El Salvador* will be brought to the Rochester diocese by the Sisters of Mercy of Rochester on Saturday, March 14 at 8 p.m., in the auditorium of Our Lady of Mercy High School, 1437 Blossom Road. The role of Jesus, the aging campesino, will be played by George Sanchez. David Perrigo will portray a son, a neighbor,

a land reform officer, a plantation foreman and the late Archbishop Oscar Romero.

*A Peasant of El Salvador* is the longest-running play of its kind in the United States. The 90-minute production won the 1985 Denver Global Justice and Peace Award and has received standing ovations in 39 states and in London since its first performance in 1981.

Graham Greene has called *Peasant* "an excellent and timely play." Pete Seeger declared it "magnificent and moving." New Age Magazine termed the production riveting two-man drama ... bare-bones brilliant theatre." A New Hampshire reviewer concluded, "It has the gentle eloquence of a folk tale, the simple beauty of a folk song and the impact of a bulldozer."

Sister Anne Curtis, a member of the Mercy

congregation's Cultural Pluralism Task Force, the local sponsors of the play, said, "We are bringing this production to our area because we feel it is a story everyone needs to hear — an experience that can move us while enlarging our understanding about the situation in Central America."

The Mercy Cultural Pluralism Task Force was established by the congregation in 1981 to promote education and sensitization about different cultures. Its membership includes Sisters Anne Curtis, Gertrude Erb (chairperson), Noreen Graney, Janet Korn, Margaret Mary Mattie and Julia Norton.

In order to enable as many people as possible to attend, tickets are being sold for \$3, and can be purchased at the door or in advance by calling (716) 288-4817 (Monday through Friday, from 9 a.m.-noon). Any proceeds from the non-profit event will be used to promote justice in El Salvador.

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