

# Palmyra

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 parishioner who has served as parish secretary for the past nine years. "People felt a little ashamed of the looks of the church."  
 "People were saying, 'Why not get some paint on the church?'" recalled Sampson. But not even painting was destined to be a simple task. Before the most obvious damage could be repaired, some less visible problems had to be addressed.

An inside paint job would have been ruined in short order, contractors pointed out, unless the church roof was repaired, its exterior bricks painted and repointed, adequate insulation, ventilation and drainage systems installed, and wiring repaired.

In Father Vasile's view, the repairs were needed as much for aesthetic reasons as for safety. "It would seem that people should have faith apart from buildings, but if you pray in a shabby building, it has an effect," he said. "How would you like to come to a place of worship and inspiration and have the physical condition of the building be a distraction?"

"It drove morale down," he concluded. "The people no longer felt comfortable in the church area."

Parishioners raised few objections to repairing the church, but sanctuary renovations

were another matter. Proposed were the removal of rear and side altars in St. Anne's sanctuary, along with removal of the baldachino, a canopy-like structure over the rear altar, and the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in a separate chapel. Also proposed was the replacement of the Stations of the Cross.

The renovations were prompted by current liturgical standards. "Environment and Art in Catholic Worship," a publication of the U.S. bishops' liturgy committee, indicates that altars which are no longer commonly used detract from a focus on the main altar used for celebration, according to Sister Estelle Martin, RSM, diocesan Liturgical Commission chairwoman for environment and art.

Recent liturgical guidelines have also expressed a clear preference for the reservation of the Blessed Sacrament in a separate chapel rather than on the main altar, Sister Martin explained.

Father Vasile sensed unhappiness over the sanctuary renovations among some parishioners. Yet their reaction was once again largely passive. No outcry was voiced at meetings organized to solicit the community's reaction. Instead, people put up what he termed "an invisible shield."

"The interest of the people seemed to be in painting the church and putting everything back the way it was, without evaluating how or why we do that," he said. "What I hear, I

think, is this quiet resignation that comes out of a history of being rolled over. There seems to be almost a grieving process continuing from the 1960s that regards this as just another bitter pill to swallow."

Despite the aesthetic reservations some parishioners harbored, few could resist the challenge of helping finance the renovation. For a small-town parish where the average family income hovers somewhere below \$20,000 per year, the overall cost of the project — nearly \$55,000 to date — was staggering. Nevertheless, parishioners determined not to borrow money, but to spend only what they were able to raise as they raised it.

That was easier to say than to do. Whereas renovation expenditures are measured in the thousands, parish fund-raising events like pie sales, barbecues and raffles usually raise dollars one at a time.

In 1985, St. Anne's instituted a program known as Fair Share, in which each parish family was asked to donate \$290 to the renovation fund, either in cash or in its equivalent of time at the rate of \$5 per hour. Bingo, instituted in January, 1986, emerged as the parish's primary fund raiser. By January, 1987, the parish had raised and expended more than \$39,000 — none of it borrowed.

"Eventually we got around to where it all came together, but it took a good many man-hours, a good many dollars and a few angels,"

Harold Sampson said. He described one instance when Father Vasile reported that funds were not available for new carpeting. Five elderly parishioners tackled the project, and in little more than a week raised enough for the carpet.

"We're going to come out pretty near even, and to me, this is a great thing," Sampson concluded. "What we did here would hardly pay the taxes on some new churches. But when you start with nothing and a job's going to cost you \$10,000, that's a lot of money, a lot of pies and raffle tickets."

Father Vasile points to increases in parish income and attendance as signs that parishioners accomplished more with the renovation than keeping out of debt. "I think people saw not only the need, but the means to achieve that need, and they were able to do it themselves," he said.

Mary Deagman, a parishioner for more than 20 years, regards the reopening of the renovated church on Christmas Eve as one of the best gifts ever. "It just lifts me up when I walk in," she said. "For so long you felt, 'Oh, can't we do something about God's house?' Now it has finally come to pass within the aid of so many people and so much kindness."

## Fundraiser to benefit youth

Parishioners from St. Mary's Church, Corning, and friends from throughout the surrounding community will gather on Saturday, Jan. 31, to raise money for Chuckie Ferratella, a 17-year-old parish youth who suffers from cancer.

The benefit, which will feature food, music and fun of all kinds, begins at 1 p.m. in the Local 1000 Union Hall, Corning. Tickets are \$5, and may be obtained by calling (607)936-8275 or 962-5458.

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