

Church expansion embodies parish's values

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

WEBSTER — Liz Mitchell surveyed parishioners who came down for snacks and coffee during an Oct. 6 reception in the new room built for Mitchell and her fellow youth group members at St. Paul's.

Commenting on the recently completed expansion of the church, 783 Hard Road, Mitchell said: "Oh, I think it's great. I love the church."

The sophomore at Webster High School added, "I don't think it matters what the building looks like. It's the people."

Mitchell's comment summed up the guiding principle of the parish's building expansion over the last year-and-a-half. On the one hand, the parish's facilities were increased considerably. In addition to the youth room on the lower floor, five new religious-education classrooms were constructed along with a nursery, kitchen, storage areas and restrooms.

On the upper floor, the parish's worship space was virtually doubled; a spacious entrance area was constructed; and rooms for a library and music rehearsals were installed.

Despite the changes, however, the cinderblock church has a rather austere, functional look to it. The building's appearance belies the tremendous expansion made over the last two years.

"We tried to keep it simple," said Tom Mitchell, Liz's father. "We didn't want to lose our ideal."

The parish's ideal includes its dedication to the poor. The church has steadily donated 10 percent of its income to various ministries within and outside of the parish's boundaries, according to Father Raymond H. Booth, pastor.

Commenting on the simple redesign of the original church, Father Booth observed: "We wanted to keep our commitment to the poor... We didn't want an elaborate cathedral type of thing."

Parishioners *did* want a little more elbow room, Father Booth noted. About two years ago, parish surveys and meetings confirmed what was already apparent to staff members, volunteers and others who regularly used the buildings at St. Paul's: the church's 1,200 families had long since outgrown the original church built to serve the needs of 300 Catholic families in 1967.

In March, 1990, the parish embarked on a \$750,000 fundraising drive, asking its members to spread their donations over a three-year period. After architect Michael Doran drew up plans for the renovation, the construction contract was awarded to contractor J.C. Pilato for \$965,000.

Bob Scheisser, a member of St. Paul's building committee, noted that the final

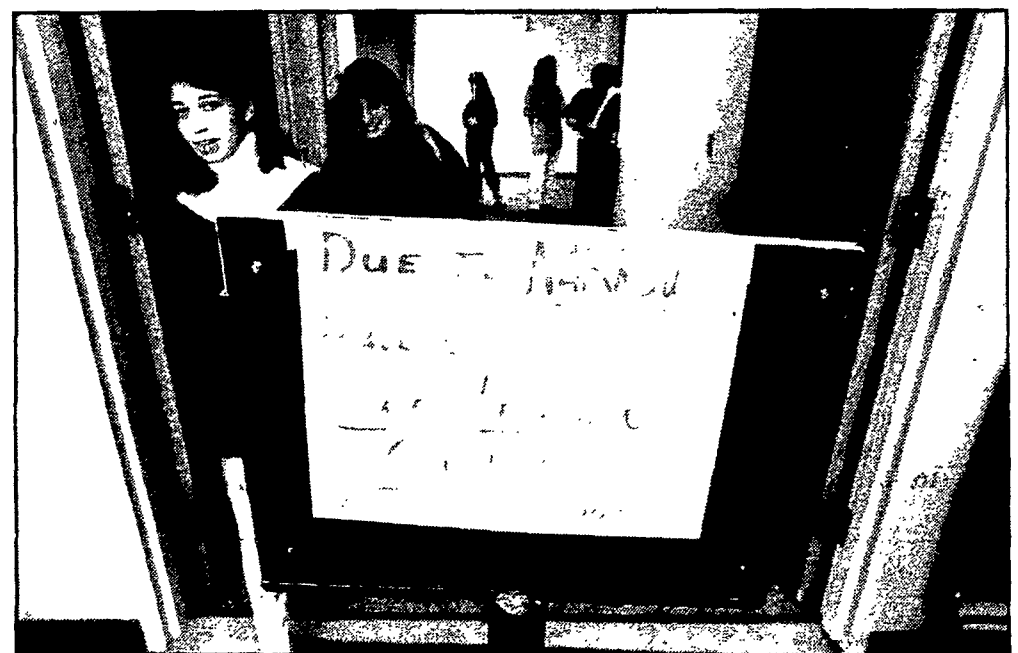


Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer

Father Raymond H. Booth vests for Mass Oct. 6. He is standing in what will eventually become a library dedicated to Father John Walsh, the founding pastor of St. Paul's Church in Webster.



Michael Kemp (left) shares the sign of peace with his brother Kevin, who can be seen through one of the church's new windows.



As part of the church renovation, five classrooms were built to help serve the parish's 550 religious-education students. Scott Rutan, director of religious education, said the new space will allow catechists to focus more on the students' needs.

cost of the parish's renovations — which included landscaping and parking area work — came to \$1.3 million.

The renovations have injected new life into such parish programs as religious education, which serves about 550 students from pre-kindergarten through the eighth grade.

Pointing out the benefits of the expansion, Scott Rutan, director of religious education, noted that, in the old church, catechists sometimes had to put up with the

noise coming from classes on the other side of dividers set up between three overcrowded classrooms. Catechists now have their own separate classrooms, he said.

"We are able to help the catechists work better with their kids," Rutan noted. "We're able to offer them an environment in which they are able to concentrate with the kids."

The renovation brought an additional benefit to the community, Rutan and others observed. The work seemed to unite

the parish, which is about to celebrate its 25th anniversary.

Hundreds of parishioners, from Boy Scouts completing service projects to senior citizens scraping paint, helped finish the church — which was dedicated in a Mass celebrated by Bishop Matthew H. Clark on Sept. 15.

Mary Kay Winter, a coordinator of the dedication and a charter member of the parish, said of the renovation process: "To me, it was kind of a rebirth."

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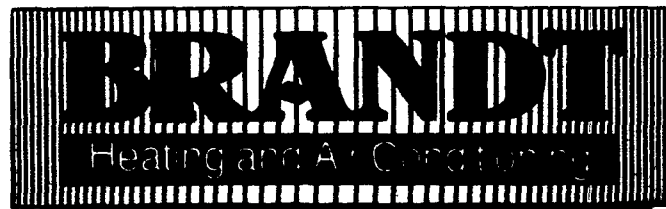
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