

Cathedral project merits respectful discussion

This week I would like to add a couple of thoughts to the discussion we have begun in *Along the Way* about the restoration of Sacred Heart Cathedral.

As you know, one of our hopes is to improve the infrastructure of our cathedral church. This would include such elements as improved lighting, enhancement of the acoustic-sound system and the provision of convenient restrooms for those who come to enjoy our cathedral.

In addition to that kind of work, we want to restore Sacred Heart so that it will conform to the norms of our church as they apply to the structure, décor and appointments of cathedral churches. Included among the elements touched upon in those norms are the major symbols of the cathedral church: altar, ambo, ambry, baptismal font, place of reservation of the Blessed Sacrament, the configuration of seating for the worshipping assembly, the bishop's cathedra (chair), the chair for presiders other than the bishop, and a suitable gathering area for the community.

In considering these symbols we think of their quality: Are they suitable for worship? Are they solid and well-crafted? Do they enhance the beauty and dignity of the environment? Do they convey the meaning they are meant to convey? Do they evoke a sense of prayer and invite the believer to ponder the mysteries of our faith?

We are attentive also to the relationship of these symbols to one another: Are they so located that their purpose and importance are clear? Does their positioning in relationship to one another serve to highlight the meaning of each and the integrity of the whole? Taken together, do they help us to experience the Risen Christ present to us in word, sacrament and assembly?

With these two basic goals in mind – to improve the infrastructure of our cathedral and to restore it to conform to the norms of our church – we have engaged the services

along the way

BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK



of Father Richard Vosko, a liturgical consultant who has received several design awards from preservation organizations. We now move to the next step in the process, the selection of an architect. We will present to the architect the two basic goals cited at the start of this paragraph. In response to that guidance, the architect will propose options by which we might meet those goals. Our committee will consider those options carefully and, after hearing the community, will make recommendations to me. I am looking forward to the opportunities we will have both to acquaint the community with the exciting possibilities before us and to consider the values we should hold high in the decision-making process.

Readers of the *Catholic Courier* have already read some of this material either in *Along the Way* or in *Courier* news stories. I review the issue here because I am deeply enthused about the work and want you to be well informed about it every step of the way.

I write about it also with the hope that those who oppose the project – something they have every right to do – would do so with arguments based in fact and with civility towards all. I become concerned when those who stand in opposition make the allegation that there is a plan for this work beyond the general designs described above. There simply is no such plan.

In addition to that concern, I have a second one. That is the language that some opponents of the project use to describe

these, as yet, non-existent plans; and, by implication, to impugn the motivation of those committed to this project. They typically use such verbs as "reckovate," gut, destroy, jackhammer and devastate to describe the work we hope to accomplish. Such language contributes nothing to respectful, civil conversation. In the short run it gains attention, alarms some people and tends to mislead others not acquainted with the facts of the matter. But it skirts the fact that a great number of parishes in our diocese have restored their churches in beautiful ways, much to the joy of the people. In addition, this manner of speaking, I am sorry to say, misrepresents the motivation of those working at considerable personal sacrifice to accomplish a good work. What good does this serve? None, I think.

Think about it for a minute. Why would any bishop in this right mind want to destroy a cathedral he loves, that is home for all of his people? Why would a pastor lead his people on a project that would diminish their faith or dishonor their heritage? Why would any architect want to be associated with a project that gutted a worthy structure and left it in ruination? Why would any liturgical consultant wish to be a part of an effort that would leave her or him with a reputation for disrespecting the church's liturgical life or the integrity of its buildings? You and I know that the answer to all of the above is they would not.

And so, dear friends, let me express the sincere wish once again that all members of our faith community participate in appropriate ways in the cathedral process. Let me add the fond hope that every one of us in our participation will be thoughtful, considerate and respectful in the expression of our thoughts and in our treatment of others.

Please pray that our efforts to enrich our cathedral church will draw us closer to the Lord and to one another.

Peace to all.



THE ARCHDIOCESE OF SAN FRANCISCO

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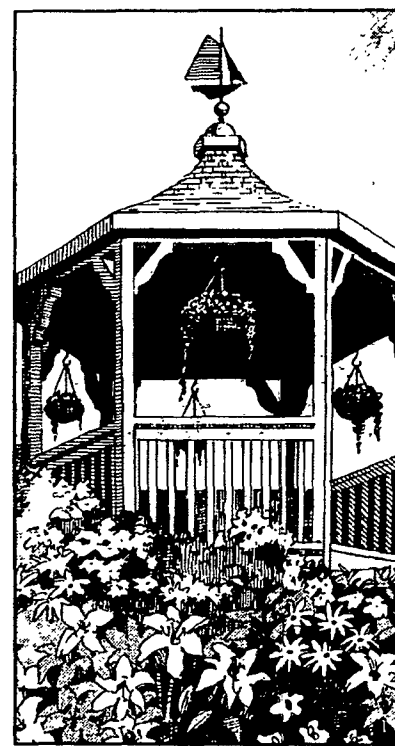
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