

Cathedral plan to include parking lot

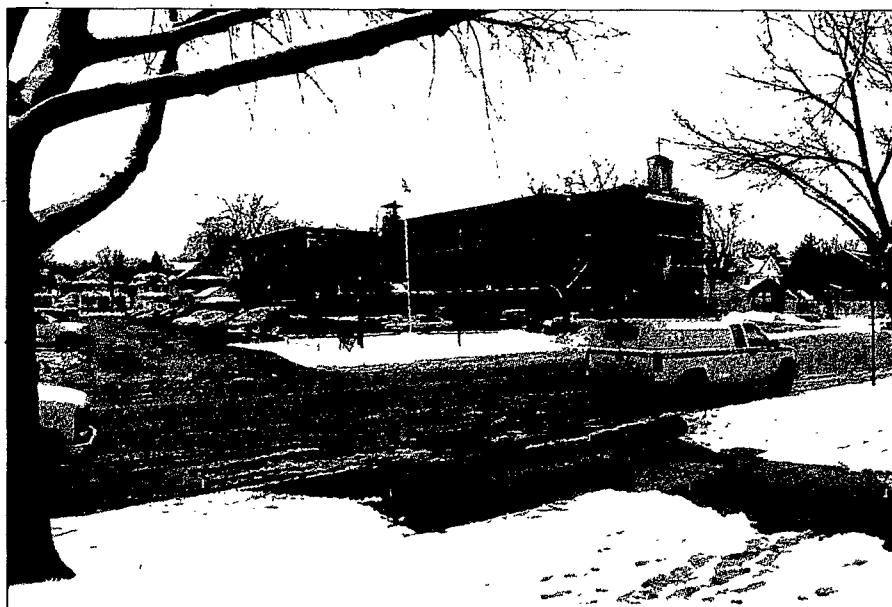
Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

Diocesan officials were scheduled to meet April 8 with officials of the City of Rochester to discuss plans to demolish several houses surrounding Sacred Heart Cathedral to make way for a new parking lot.

Michael Tedesco, diocesan director of communications, said that over the past 10 months the diocese has purchased eight to 10 houses, located near the corner of Flower City Park and Primrose Street in Rochester. All of the houses had been rental properties in recent years, and none is currently occupied, Tedesco said.

The cathedral, at 296 Flower City Park, has long suffered from inadequate parking, Tedesco noted. He explained that on-street parking is limited and that the only existing parking for the cathedral is across Flower City Park from the cathedral entrance, on the Sacred Heart School campus. The diocese also wants to create a drop-off area for handicapped access, he said.

"What we have to remember is the cathedral is the mother church for the 12-county diocese," Tedesco



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

The only parking currently available for Sacred Heart Cathedral is on Flower City Park or across the street in the lot adjacent to Sacred Heart School.

said. "It's all part of an effort to make the cathedral more welcoming for those who come to worship."

Tedesco said that the diocese has been open with parishioners and nearby residents about its plans to create a new parking lot. He noted

that Father John Mulligan, pastor of Sacred Heart and a diocesan vicar general, recently explained the plan in detail during a weekend homily.

Tedesco added that landscaping for the parking lot will be an important consideration. "The diocese

has a commitment to the city and the Maplewood neighborhood. Aesthetics will be taken into account very seriously," he said. "We're willing to work within the city to make this project acceptable and pleasing to the fullest."

He said that former residents of houses the diocese plans to demolish "were understandably upset about the prospect to move. Other than that, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive on the part of the community."

However, Tedesco also acknowledged that some of those now voicing opposition to the parking lot actually are concerned with other aspects of cathedral renovation.

"There have been attempts to sidetrack this project from the onset," he said, noting efforts by a group known as the Sacred Heart Preservation Group to obtain landmark status for the cathedral.

The overall cathedral renovation is projected to cost at least \$6 million. Tedesco said work on the project was originally set to begin this July 1, and to be completed by Easter 2004. Due to ongoing disputes, however, "we don't know if that's feasible or not," he said.

Financial woes force Pastoral Center layoffs

Nine posts eliminated; others' hours reduced

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Due to decreased diocesan revenues and rising health-insurance costs, the Diocese of Rochester's Pastoral Center has been forced to lay off nine people, including one department director, according to Father Joseph A. Hart, diocesan vicar general and moderator of the Pastoral Center.

The diocese also has reduced six Pastoral Center positions from full-time to part-time, and shifted two employees from their current positions at the Pastoral Center. The diocese also announced that Pastoral Center employees will not receive salary increases for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2003, and will bear a greater share of employee health-insurance premiums. The diocese currently pays 75 percent of the cost of employees' health-insurance costs, and will reduce its contribution to 65 percent as of Jan. 1, 2004.

Father Hart announced the layoffs and reductions during a meet-

ing on the afternoon of April 7. He repeatedly stressed that the layoffs were a result of the diocese's economic woes and not related to job performance.

"Every area of the budget has been scrutinized to determine where expenses could be reduced," he said. "After lengthy study and discussion, and the exploration of several other options, it became apparent that the only effective way to manage the Pastoral Center's budgetary problems was through reductions in the staff itself."

Father Hart noted that the 2002-03 Thanks Giving Appeal, the diocese's primary fundraiser, fell short of its \$4.931 million goal by 6 percent. He added that the diocese's investment income has decreased significantly over the past few years as a result of poor stock market performance. Overall, he said, the diocese faces an approximate decrease in revenue of \$700,000 as it heads into 2003-04. He also noted that the goal for the 2003-04 TGA will be reduced from the 2002-03 level because the appeal is being folded into the Partners in Faith capital campaign (see related story on page 3).

Compounding decreasing revenue challenges is an expected 15 percent rise in health-insurance premiums next year, Father Hart added.

"The diocese is deeply concerned that these difficulties will be present not just for the short term," Father Hart said.

Father Hart also noted that the diocese is nearing completion of a costly Pastoral Center renovation, which was planned when the economy was in much better shape. He said the diocese was required to go forward with the project by contracts signed two years ago, prior to the current economic downturn.

"If we had foreknowledge of this economic situation, we would have never have agreed to the work," he said.

Michael Tedesco, diocesan spokesman, said full- and part-time positions were eliminated in the following ministerial areas: three in the Department of Human Resources; and one each from the Tribunal, Parish Support Ministries, Evangelization and Catechesis, Communications, Pastoral Planning and Finance. Position hours were reduced in Parish Support Ministries, Evan-

gelization and Catechesis and Information Technology, he said. One Tribunal employee is being transferred to a parish, and one Information Technology employee was transferred to Human Resources.

Father Hart acknowledged the pain the job cuts and reductions would bring, and likened the Pastoral Center staff to a family facing difficult times.

"You are an important part of our diocesan family and, like any family, you sometimes have to tighten the belt," he told employees in attendance at the meeting. He added that the diocese was providing severance and career-counseling services to employees whose positions had been eliminated.

Tedesco said the diocese only recently arrived at decisions to cut or reduce positions, and will now have to sort out how to meet the need for services with fewer people.

"Directors will be meeting with staff to determine how the services and support these (former) staff members provided will be made up and distributed," he said. "We're now a smaller work force. We were a lean staff to begin with."