

# New look at Marion parish

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

MARION — Renovations that are changing the interior and exterior of St. Gregory Church have already increased seating capacity and will eventually make the building more accessible to people with handicaps or who have difficulty walking.

A lift is being installed to make the 89-year-old church easily accessible, according to Howard Bartlett, chairman of St. Gregory's finance committee. The church is clustered with St. Anne's Church in Palmyra.

Bartlett said the lift, which will enable users to enter the church and the church hall below, was a much-needed improvement.

"We have to tug people in wheelchairs up these stairs," he said as he stood outside the current church entrance.

Parishioner Virginia Christianson, 77, has twice undergone open-heart surgery and last year fell and hurt her back. She said that in order to attend Mass she has to pull herself up a flight of stairs that lead to the church entrance. Her husband walks behind her to support her, she added.

"I can't stand up too much," she said. "It's hard for me to walk so I could use a lift."

The lift installation is part of a \$140,000 renovation project that is being funded by a capital campaign, fundraising activities and a \$19,000 grant from the Diocese of Rochester, said Bartlett and Tom Verstraete, chairman of St. Gregory's building committee. Work on the church should be completed by December, the men said, adding that additional work is still planned for the parish office/rectory across the way on Union Street.

Father Robert Gaudio, pastor of St. Anne and St. Gregory, said St. Gregory reduced its weekend Masses from two to one last September as part of the overall pastoral-planning process by the cluster and other parishes of western Wayne County. Bartlett added that the Mass reduction compelled the installation of extra pews in St. Gregory to accommodate people who had previously attended Saturday Mass. Overall,



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

A \$140,000 renovation project at St. Gregory Church in Marion includes increased seating and the installation of a lift for those who cannot walk.

seating capacity has increased by 40 percent, he said. About 200 to 220 people attend St. Gregory's Sunday 9:30 a.m. Mass, Father Gaudio said, and the parish has about 400 registered families.

Verstraete noted that the parish began the five-year capital campaign in September 2001 and has been able to continuously raise enough money from parishioner do-

nations to keep from going into debt.

"We didn't have to borrow any money so we're not wasting any money by paying interest," Verstraete said.

In addition to the lift and the new pews, the renovation has included or will include the following actions:

- Restoration and relocation of seven stained-glass windows from the front of the church and its bell tower to the rear and sides.
- Repair and replacement of part of the office/rectory roof, as well as the siding and trim.
- Construction of a new sacristy, and renovation of the altar area.

Through it all, both men said, St. Gregory's has continually celebrated eucharistic liturgies.

"We've never missed a Mass," Bartlett said. "And we don't expect to."

## HOUSE PASSES D.C. VOUCHER INITIATIVE

Gerard Perseghin/CNS

WASHINGTON — A \$10 million school voucher initiative for the District of Columbia was approved by the House Appropriations Committee on July 15. Two days later, the Senate Appropriations Committee postponed a vote on the city's budget amid heated discussion of eliminating the initiative.

The voucher measure in the Senate is a \$40 million plan that would provide vouchers up to \$7,500 for about 2,000 low-income students to attend private, charter or public schools.

The Bush administration and U.S. Education Secretary Rod Paige have supported the bill. Washington Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick and district Mayor Anthony Williams support it on the condition that it also includes funding for public and charter schools.

The cardinal, in his July 10 column in the *Catholic Standard*, Washington archdiocesan newspaper, praised the voucher bill as part of a multifaceted school approach.

"We believe that a rising tide should lift all boats, as the saying goes, and that we must work together for all the schoolchildren in this remarkable and important city," he wrote.

The cardinal said the voucher program was particularly important for "lower-income parents who theoretically have a right to send their children to a nonpublic school but do not have the means to exercise that right because of poverty."

Ronald Jackson, executive director of the District of Columbia Catholic Conference, said the voucher legislation is "a big step in the right direction" because it looks at the whole education picture and "talks about leveling the playing field."

He said the bill is a five-year pilot program which would test the voucher concept without a long-term commitment.

In committee hearings, opponents of the program argued that the plan would deprive public schools of more money. But voucher supporters said putting more money into public schools was not the answer.

Rep. Ed Schrock, R-Va., said that "if money made the difference, every kid in the district would graduate as valedictorian."

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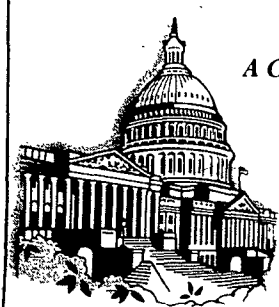
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