

A letter to the Parish Family of the Church of St. Mary,

“Now is an acceptable time.” These words were spoken at our St. Mary’s parish Mass on Ash Wednesday, 2017, and rang true in many ways as we progressed through Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. The statement hit home even more as we received, digested, and accepted the letters and decision of the Diocesan Building Commission (DBC) and the Bishop, and in our continued conversation with our parish, the public, and the press.

The DBC had the HUGE task of interpreting and evaluating our proposal to restore the Church of St. Mary. They worked on this for over 6 weeks. They analyzed the information from our general contractor (Breitbach Construction), architect (HMA), the forensic report (Braun Intertec) and met multiple times. After all of this work, they sent a letter to Bishop Kettler denying approval for the proposal of pure restoration of the Church of St. Mary. The DBC further recommended that we need to build a new facility that completely addresses a 21st century parish and its *future* needs. The recommendation was based on functionality, codes, future additions, maintenance, operations, accessibility and liturgical considerations.

We then met with the DBC and Bishop Kettler to clarify their letters and recommendations. A member of the DBC, who is a trained architect and works for a reputable building company, walked through our church in July 2016 and was immediately concerned with the condition and possible pitfalls. He shared serious concerns regarding the condition of the brick and mortar, fire, water, smoke damage and cost and contingencies of restoration, future maintenance and potential additions. The Bishop and DBC were clear that their recommendations would stand and that we should make a proposal for a new worship space. This proposal could include items from our current church (possibly windows, steeples, stations, altars, etc.), must meet the requirements summarized in the DBC letter and must be financially sound.

We are taking our first steps towards our new church. This could include a dining area, gathering space and offices. We are working with Ken Griesemer ( <http://www.stfstudio.net>). We have been impressed with his expertise and concern for our parish. He has worked with parishes going through transformations (and fires) for over 30 years and is looking forward to getting to know us, listen to what we want and need, and collaborate with our entire parish, architect and diocese. He will be with us June 15-19. He will meet with our architect and is expecting to meet with many of us and be at our weekend Masses. He is learning about the struggles of our journey. We are hopeful that he will help incorporate our past into a church and facility for our present and future.

Fourteen months ago we thought our church could be restored to its original state. Our journey has been difficult and is not over. The Parish Council, Finance Council and Church Building Team understand and support the decision and recommendation of the DBC and Bishop Kettler. We have the opportunity to build a beautiful church that will serve our parish for the next 100 years. By working together, The Church of St. Mary will be known to all as the church that rose from the ashes! We love our church and we will have a wonderful church and facilities- one that we will build for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren.

With much gratitude and hope,

- Parish Council, The Church of St. Mary