

JANUARY 2008

On the Feast of Corpus Christi 2007, Bishop Morlino announced his intention to build a new cathedral church for the Diocese of Madison on the site of the cathedral destroyed by arson in 2005.

The intention is to build a worthy cathedral (in a classical style, adorned with fine sacred art), large enough to accommodate major diocesan celebrations (about one thousand seats). Bishop Morlino has announced that the spire of the former cathedral – rebuilt only about a year before the fire – will be incorporated into the new cathedral.

In order to build a large cathedral and other necessary facilities on the available property, the new cathedral will be built perpendicular to the former church (the front doors will face Fairchild Street, with the building running along West Main). It is probable that the surviving cathedral rectory as well as the ruins of the cathedral will be demolished in order to use the available property as well as possible.

Feasibility Study

There are not yet any plans or even conceptual drawings for the new cathedral. Before work on such plans can begin, we must have an idea of how much money will be available for this project.

In order to ascertain how much money can be raised in a diocesan capital campaign, the Diocese has engaged the services of the Phoenix Group of Madison to conduct a feasibility study. The study will also consider what other significant diocesan needs might be included in a diocesan capital campaign.

We are currently awaiting the results of the feasibility study, which are expected in early 2008. Once Bishop Morlino has a sense of how much money will be available to build a new cathedral complex, we will begin to search for architects and solicit proposals.

Cathedral Heritage

In the meantime, a Cathedral Heritage Committee has been formed to assist with the preservation, reuse or disposal of the fabric and contents of the existing cathedral facilities. Following are some notes about the discussions of the committee thus far.

Cathedral Structure

The spire and the bells it contains are in very good condition, and will be used in the new cathedral.

The cathedral is built of beautiful limestone, but it has been very weathered in a century and a half. It is not feasible to use the stone for the structure of the new cathedral. It should be possible to use some of the stone on the grounds of the new cathedral – for a perimeter wall, an outdoor shrine, or some other decorative element on the cathedral grounds. When the existing ruins are taken down, the effort will be made to save at least some of the decorative stonework around the front doors of the cathedral . . . but again, this has deteriorated over the 150 years the cathedral has stood.

Mosaics

The most important feature of the cathedral interior is the mosaic of St. Raphael located at the center of the sanctuary. This mosaic and its marble framing survived the fire in very good condition, and is currently being protected by a plywood enclosure built after the fire.

The difficulty is that the mosaic is affixed to the front wall of the cathedral. It is essentially immovable. The ideal would be to use the mosaic as the front wall of a chapel coming

perpendicular off the nave of a new cathedral. Preserving the mosaic and its wall while the rest of the cathedral is being demolished will require special effort, but it is hoped that it will not be prohibitively expensive to do so.

The two mosaics at the sides of the sanctuary survived the fire in good condition, and appear to be mounted on panels that are movable. These were more recently installed, and do not seem to have the sentimental value of the central mosaic. Also, they are in a more modern style that may not be compatible with the new cathedral. If they are not used in the cathedral, they could be offered for use in another church of the diocese.

Marble furnishings

The marble sanctuary furnishing of the cathedral survived the fire, though there was damage to some pieces (including slight damage to the main altar). At the moment, the marble items are either in storage or under the protective enclosure built for the mosaic.

The individual pieces are being saved with the intention of using them in a worthy way in the new cathedral. It is hoped that the old altar, perhaps a bit refashioned, may be used as the altar of a chapel in the new cathedral.

Marble panels

The walls of the foyer between the cathedral and rectory, including a former baptismal chapel, are covered with marble, which survived the fire in tact.

The consensus of the Cathedral Heritage Committee is that this marble has little sentimental value to most parishioners since it was not visible from the body of the cathedral. We are advised that the cost of removing and reusing the marble would be nearly equivalent to the cost of new marble, and that some breakage would occur in the course of removal.

It does not seem cost-effective to remove and reuse all the marble panels, but it is hoped that there will be some small space in the new cathedral in which some of this marble can be reused. The intention is to remove and save only as much of the marble as we will need for a specific purpose.

Stained glass windows

Many of the windows of the cathedral were very badly damaged; a couple survived in tact; and several are in an intermediate condition.

The consensus is that the former windows were not of outstanding artistic value, and that few parishioners were highly attached to them. There is the further complication that windows that were exposed to the heat of the fire may have become fragile even if they appear in tact.

The intention is to save the small semi-circular windows featuring angels that were above the front doors of the cathedral and to use them in a similar way in the new cathedral. The hope is that there will be some place in the new cathedral complex where a limited amount of the glass from the surviving windows can be used.

There are also decorative windows (with diamond shaped colored glass) from the sacristy and elsewhere that can easily be removed and used somewhere in the new cathedral complex. And finally, very old windows previously used in the cathedral are in storage. These are of only historical interest, and could be cleaned up and displayed in some way in the new cathedral complex.

Statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The silver statue of the Blessed Mother that stood just below the steps to the cathedral sanctuary is charred but in tact, and seems a good candidate for restoration and use in the new cathedral complex.

Altar crucifix

The crucifix that was affixed to the mosaic behind the main altar survived with significant damage (notably to one arm). Since the fire, this crucifix has been used for the veneration of the Cross on Good Friday.

The restoration of this crucifix was discussed at a St Raphael/St Patrick Parish Council meeting in 2007. The consensus was that this crucifix should be preserved in its damaged condition and given a place of honor in the new cathedral as a memorial of the fire. It would not be the principal crucifix of the new cathedral.

Tabernacle

The tabernacle survived the fire with some damage; decorative elements on the doors came off. The mediocre artistic merit of the tabernacle makes it doubtful that it would be used in the new cathedral.

Other liturgical items

Apart from most or all of the Stations of the Cross, little else that was in the body of the cathedral survived the fire.

Items that were in the sacristy were unaffected by the fire. The Cathedral monstrance and tall processional candles are in use at St. Patrick. Other sacred vessels are in storage at St. Patrick. Some vestments are in use at St. Patrick and Holy Redeemer. Remaining vestments will be evaluated for the future usefulness.

Piano

The cathedral grand piano survived the fire in remarkably good condition. It is being restored and put to use at the Bishop O'Connor Catholic Center until there is a place for it in the new cathedral complex.

Household furnishings

A highly decorative chair from the cathedral rectory was used as the bishop's throne for the Pontifical High Mass at Holy Redeemer. A large crucifix is likewise being used on the altar for the Tridentine Mass.

Some household furnishings are already in use at Holy Redeemer. Some plumbing fixtures have been removed to replace broken fixtures in buildings of our other parishes. Some kitchen and dining room items are in use at the Holy Redeemer rectory.

The Cathedral Heritage Committee is working on the evaluation of all the household furnishings belonging to the cathedral rectory. Items that are useful in the current life of our parishes will be used as needed. Items that are of such quality or antiquity to be worthy of preservation for a new cathedral rectory will be stored.

In spring, parishioners and employees of our linked parishes will be given the opportunity to participate in a silent auction on furniture and other significant items that are of good quality but that would likely not be used in a new rectory.

In August, there will be a tag sale open to the public on all remaining unneeded items.

Rectory structure

The Cathedral Heritage Committee is in touch with Habitat for Humanity to arrange the salvage of an elements of the rectory (doors, cabinets, etc) that can be put to good use prior to the demolition of the rectory.