

Build or Not Update **Expanded Narthex?**

Over the last several years, expanding the narthex has actually been “on the radar” as a high priority concern, going back at least as far as plans for installing an elevator in the church building. It was a major part of virtually every area of concern of our Long-Range Strategic Planning Committee efforts. And, while it didn’t have a particularly high priority score in the recent survey, still there were many comments from individuals and from the various organizations that this committee spoke with which called for this action.

The main, perhaps most obvious, concern is that even for current usage needs, it is way too small; we simply need more space. Especially since the tabernacle has been moved to the sanctuary of the church, many are concerned that we need to maintain a quiet, prayerful atmosphere in the main worship space. It is not so much that the chatting and greeting we are used to doing before and after Masses is irreverent, it’s that occasionally, parishioners or visitors want to spend some prayful time before or after mass. In those cases, for everyone to feel welcome, it would be preferable if the community greeting and fellowship could be reserved to an adequately large gathering space outside the sanctuary. In an expanded area, after Masses, we could also have coffee and donuts and similar fellowship events in the narthex, rather than *down the stairs in St. Joe Hall*.

We need more room also for registrations, volunteer sign-ups, bake sales, ticket sales, quilt raffles, membership recruitment, etc., for our parish organizations, as well as for fellowship. When we have tried to hold such things in St. Joe Hall, very few people come downstairs for them. When we can catch people in the narthex (or just outside the main doors in good weather), all these activities run more smoothly with greater success.

For weddings: We currently do not have adequate space for a “bride’s room” — brides & bridesmaids meet in the conference room in St. Joe Hall or one of the classrooms. Groomsmen usually are left to either meet outside or to cram into the Preparation Room (Sacristy). And although we encourage reception lines to be held *at the reception*, nonetheless people often assemble just outside the church, weather permitting. It would be much more hospitable to have adequate space in the narthex.

For funerals: We always have at least an hour of visitation at St. Jerome before a funeral liturgy (Mass of Christian Burial), and on occasion visitation on the evening before is held at church rather than at the funeral home. Before the funeral Mass the visitation is usually held in our narthex, and, again, it is a crowded space, even when there is a smaller number of people.

For solemn liturgies/processions: There are several occasions in our liturgical year that call for the assembly to gather outside of church for a solemn procession, e.g. Palm Sunday, and “Candlemas” (which we just celebrated on Feb. 2). Without sufficient gathering space, we often have to forgo these processions.

St. Jerome Build or Not Committee