

Good morning. I'm glad to see you all here on Sunday morning after St. Patrick's Day. Last night at the Parting Glass pub, I learned the origins of the Irish Jig: Too much to drink and not enough restrooms! This morning there are two updates from the Vestry: The Rector Search process and the New Parish House.

The first update is on the Rector Search: As you may recall, we are in the "Information" phase. That is the period in which Vestry gathers information about the search process from the Albany Diocese's Transition Minister, provides information about the search process to the congregation, and receives information from the congregation. The next step is the parish survey.

The survey has been finalized. The survey contains several questions about one's preferences in worship, in a minister, and so forth. Our survey is a little longer than most, but since this is the first search for a new Rector in over 50 years, the Vestry thought it prudent to seek more information from the congregation. All affiliated with Bethesda, past and present, are welcome to participate in the survey, including our youth who are of age to comprehend the questions.

Currently, the Vestry is working out the final logistics for distribution of the survey. It will be available in both electronic and paper formats. The last words on the Rector Search: The survey is the principal means for the Vestry to obtain the preferences of the congregation – *your opinions matter* - so please complete a survey.

The second update is on New Parish House and Community Center: As reported at the Annual Meeting on January 30th, there is an ever-growing interest in Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center serving as a focal-point to serve those in need in our community. Gordon Boyd and I have had informal, preliminary discussions with Shelters of Saratoga, and other civil and government organizations, about securing a permanent location for the Code Blue program.

Code Blue was started in December 2013, as a collaborative effort between the City of Saratoga Springs, faith-based groups, individuals and non-profit partners committed to assisting individuals who are homeless. Code Blue was founded in response to the tragic death of Nancy Pitts. She was a 54-year-old homeless woman who died of exposure, while she slept in the loading dock area behind the Saratoga Senior Center. Her death highlighted a problem: There were no

shelters in Saratoga where a person could simply spend a night, to escape life-threatening temperatures.

In 2018, there remains a need for programs and facilities to serve homeless individuals and families left behind in Saratoga Springs's otherwise booming economy. Presently, the proposal for a new Code Blue site on Walworth Street has divided the Saratoga Springs community and has resulted in protracted civil litigation.

In keeping with our Christian mission, and in fulfillment of the biblical directive of "tikkun olam" or "world repair," Bethesda can help unite our community. Bethesda can bring the community together on behalf of those most in need - individuals who have nowhere to turn for shelter, warmth, and care. We only need to think back to Christmas time to recall Mary and Joseph for inspiration, as they found no room at any inn. Code Blue has migrated from St. Peter's church to the Salvation Army, to the Soul Saving Station, and still needs a permanent home. If it's God's will, Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center may be that home.

Now is the time for Bethesda to return to its historic position in Saratoga Springs, as a leader and unifier in service of the community and those in need. Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center is ideal for numerous reasons. I'll highlight seven of them:

1. Bethesda's mission-centric concept for its New Parish House: Bethesda's building is planned to comprise nearly 20,000 square feet. It will comprise of a full-catering kitchen, dining hall, parish offices and space we plan to provide to organizations that are compatible with Bethesda's charitable mission. Our goal is to lease space to such organizations at reduced rental rates and for long terms. The New Parish House's 3rd and 4th floor plans total more than 10,000 square feet, so there is ample space for men's and women's sleeping rooms, showers and bathrooms, laundry and staff offices. The common kitchen and dining hall on the first floor would be available as needed. Bethesda's New Parish House would also have security systems to ensure the safety and protection of the building's occupants.

2. Permanency: Bethesda has been at our present location since 1842. Our longevity in the community and willingness to have long-term tenants in our new building would bring the sense of permanence Code Blue lacks and desires.

3. Regulatory Compliance: A program such as Code Blue is permitted on Washington Street under the city's Zoning Code. Bethesda would only need a minor modification to our existing planning approval from the City Planning Board. Such approval is reportedly simple. We therefore could break ground this year and be ready for occupancy before winter 2019-20.

4. Additional Programs: We have had preliminary conversations with Saratoga County about making Bethesda the location for a Department of Social Services satellite office. DSS serves many clients in Saratoga Springs, but those clients must travel some distance to meet with caseworkers, receive referrals, or do other business with DSS. Bethesda's location can help solve that need as well.

Furthermore, Bethesda has an over 75-year relationship with Alcoholics Anonymous. AA's peer-focused approach would be of value to many of the individuals served by Shelters of Saratoga and Code Blue. Another community supporter of our proposal has expressed interest in establishing a job-readiness program at Bethesda.

5. Central Location: Bethesda's central downtown location, just a half block from Broadway, offers ideal access for those seeking shelter and other social services. Furthermore, Bethesda is in a commercial area and is not located near an elementary school or single-family residences.

6. Bethesda's Welcoming, Dignified Environment: Our parish is a welcoming, inclusive and caring community. There would be opportunities for members of our congregation to volunteer their time and talents to help individuals and families. Our new building's design will offer a sense of dignity and grace for all who enter it, as it complements the church's neo-gothic style and historic aspect. Proximity to our church, and the spiritual nature of our New Parish House, will also present opportunities to

passively or actively proselytize to those seeking help, guidance and a sense of being.

7. Community Support: We have discussed these ideas with several community, philanthropic, religious and political leaders. Their responses have been favorable and encouraging. We strongly believe that whatever additional support, including financial contributions, needed to create a permanent location for Code Blue at Bethesda would be forthcoming.

In the coming weeks, we will seek to garner even more community and political support for our New Parish House and Community Center. Therefore, you will likely hear in the public realm more about Bethesda as a possible solution to Code Blue's predicament.

Scripture tells us we are responsible to help the poor, the homeless, and the needy. The Good Samaritan, though not responsible for the plight of the man lying beside the road, was responsible to love his neighbor as himself. The Good Samaritan did this not simply by refraining from further harming him, but by actively helping him. The Good Samaritan generously used his time and money

to care for him. Jesus instructed us to do the same. (Luke 10:25-37). As Jesus said, “For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat . . . In that you did it for one of the least of these brothers [and sisters] of mine, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:34-35).

With God’s help, and in fulfilment of our Christian mission, Bethesda’s New Parish House and Community Center can become a central place to serve the poor and needy in our community. Please continue to keep this important project in your prayers.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Vestry, may your Lenten observance and Easter celebration bring you renewed faith in God. May you be blessed with *hope and love* through Christ Jesus’s resurrection.

Thank you for your time and attention this morning.

