

Good morning. Today's update from the Vestry is focused on Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center project. Please note, there will also be a question and answer session on this topic at the pot-luck supper on November 1st.

Before I begin, some good news on the Rector search process: On October 16, the Vestry met with Bishop Love. He informed us that he was contacted by a priest who is very interested in becoming Bethesda's next Rector. This priest expressed keen interest in Bethesda's pursuit to help the homeless through its New Parish House project. The Vestry welcomed this news and is promptly moving forward with this priest's application.

Back to the New Parish House, in thinking about how to present a lot of information in a short period of time, I arrived at a format that educates people who are not familiar with the project, while also providing an up to date status report to those who have been following this project since inception. The format answers a series of questions, known as the "five W's": What, Where, Who, When and Why?

What? A 30,000-square-foot, four-story new Bethesda parish house and community center, designed by architects John G. Waite Associates. The new building will be in the style of renowned American architect Richard Upjohn, who

designed the original Bethesda church building in 1841. That means our new structure will be reminiscent and complementary of Upjohn's gothic revival design of our church.

Our New Parish House will include welcoming program space, a courtyard, a large dining hall, professional kitchen, parish offices, library, choir rehearsal space, and meeting and counseling rooms. The first floor is dedicated for Bethesda's use. There will be offices, for example, that are solely for church operations. Other spaces, such as the dining hall and kitchen, will be available for community service groups' use when not being used by the church. In this way, Bethesda is sharing its resources to benefit others, in accordance with Holy Scripture. To be clear, when Bethesda needs to use any space on the first floor, Bethesda will have first call on that space.

Our New Parish House will have apartments on the upper three floors, operated by Mercy House of Saratoga, Inc. Mercy House is a not-for-profit corporation established by Bethesda. Mercy House's mission is to provide supportive housing for homeless individuals and families in our community in furtherance of Bethesda's religious mission. Mercy House has a separate board approved by Bethesda's Vestry, but as an organization, Mercy House is non-denominational.

The Mercy House space, comprising apartments with one and two bedrooms, will safely accommodate more than 40 residents year-round. Each apartment will have a kitchen and bathroom. Each floor will have its own laundry facility and counseling space. What we are offering is called “supportive housing.”

What is “supportive housing”? Supportive housing, as defined by the Supportive Housing Network of New York, is “affordable housing with onsite services that help formerly homeless, disabled tenants live in dignity in the community.” Supportive housing “is the most humane and cost-effective solution to ending homelessness for vulnerable people: individuals and families dealing with mental illness, trauma/abuse, addiction, and chronic illness....”

Bethesda’s New Parish House and Community Center will be a beautiful, dignified building, adding to the renovation and development of downtown Saratoga Springs. It will have security features which are being designed by a team of security professionals working with our architects. Some of the security features to help protect all those present include: (i) 24-hour video surveillance, (ii) around the clock on-site supervision, (iii) secure and limited access to the building, (iv) swipe card access to the upper floors so that only those who belong on each floor

can access that floor, and (v) house rules and code of conduct which engender a sense of community and safety. Bethesda and Mercy House are committed to the principle that one should feel safe in one's environment in order to thrive.

Where? Bethesda's New Parish House and Community Center will be located adjacent to the church. The new building will be connected to the church near the church's bell tower by a covered enclosed walkway. This connecting walkway will also serve to provide privacy to the courtyard.

In this way, Bethesda members will have ease of access to the New Parish House. Bathrooms will be easily accessible, for example. Children will also attend religious education classes while their parents attend coffee hour in the dining hall.

Mercy House residents will find our downtown location offers easy access to employment opportunities, bus lines, a supermarket and shops, the Franklin Community Center, and a primary-care health facility operated by Saratoga Hospital.

Who? The New Parish House will serve Bethesda parish, the congregation; the Rector; music director; and staff, as well as the Saratoga community.

Mercy House accommodations are for individuals and families already in our midst who need safe supportive housing. Through Mercy House's partners, residents will be selectively referred to Mercy House based on their ability to live independently, their mental health or substance use recovery status, as well as other criteria. A recent study counted over 200 people as homeless in Saratoga county. Mercy House will serve over 40 people who are transitioning out of a traditional homeless shelter or other group settings into more independent living arrangements. Our goal is to provide Mercy House's guests with a step towards sustainable independence, which is also the objective of our housing-partner organizations. The groups partnering with Bethesda and Mercy House include:

1. Transitional Services Association, or TSA, which helps individuals with mental illness or substance-use disabilities, many of whom may be homeless.
2. Backstretch Employee Service Team, or BEST, which helps race-track workers who are either injured and recuperating or have substance use disorders and are participating in recovery programs. BEST is committed to using the fourth floor from April until November.

3. AIM Services, Inc., which provides residential and community-based services to people with disabilities, including those with traumatic brain injuries.
4. In Our Name, a local organization focused on restorative justice, plans to offer an occasional café operation where people can pay according to their financial means.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), and CREATE – a non-profit art therapy organization - are also extremely interested in occupying spaces. Saratoga County Department of Social Services (DSS) also has individuals who could occupy the fourth-floor apartments when BEST is not using them from November through March. The fourth floor will be a “dry and sober” space. Individuals referred to Mercy House by DSS will be pre-screened to ensure that each is sober and appropriate to live in an apartment in Mercy House.

TSA, BEST and In Our Name have all signed detailed letters of intent to express their commitment to this project. We are starting the process of formalized leases with these organizations. Saratoga County DSS has also provided us with a letter of support for this project.

Mercy House will not be hosting a Code Blue homeless shelter, which accepts people coming in off the street in any condition, even if the person is intoxicated or under the influence of an illegal drug. Bethesda and Mercy House fully support the worthy efforts of Shelters of Saratoga in operating the Code Blue program, but Code Blue will *not* be part of our operations.

When? We plan to break ground this coming winter. We have begun discussions with Saratoga National Bank to provide bridge financing based on the anticipated gift from an anonymous donor. This donor has generously promised to provide us with the necessary funds from the donor's sale of a business. A temporary loan, along with the over \$2 million Bethesda already has on hand for this project, would allow Bethesda to start construction as soon a building permit is issued. The anonymous donor is committed to helping Bethesda and Mercy House address the housing issues in our community. The result of the donor's gift will be a new parish house, debt-free once the donation is complete. Saratoga National Bank is currently reviewing documents from the donor, Bethesda and Mercy House.

Meanwhile, our architects have prepared bid documents, and we are going out to bid next week. We anticipate bids to be returned in November and the selection of a construction contractor by early December. The construction firm will then

apply for a building permit from the City. Building permits typically take about four to six weeks. We are seeking the support of City leaders to expedite our building permit application because our project will help meet an urgent community priority.

Why? Bethesda's commitment helping others in need is in keeping with our Christian faith. It also provides us with a new mission in keeping with Bethesda's long history of helping those in need. The Holy Bible is replete with passages directing us to serve the poor and those in need to fulfill God's will. When describing our project to people in the community, some have remarked that what Bethesda is doing is right out of the Gospel according to Matthew. As you may recall, in Matthew 25 it is written:

“Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’” (Matthew 25:34-36).

German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis for plotting against Adolf Hitler, believed that Jesus genuinely wants us to live the gospel. Bethesda needs another mission that allows us as a congregation to practice what is preached here on Sundays. Not long before he was executed by the Nazis, Bonhoeffer wrote, "The Church is the Church only when it exists for others." Bethesda through this mission to help those in need in Saratoga Springs, is putting Jesus' teachings into practice.

God is at work here, and we thank God for this progress. May God continue to bless you and Bethesda.