

# Archbishop O'Brien dedicates new facility in Fulton

It had become a back-breaking ritual.

After the 11 a.m. Mass every Sunday, parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi in Fulton folded up all the chairs in the church, stacked them and converted the church into classroom space for religious education Sunday through Tuesday evening.

If there was a funeral or other event within that time, it meant pulling everything back out to reorient the space back into liturgical use - and then going through the process all over again.

"It really was a lot of work," said Father Dennis P. Diehl, pastor.

Father Diehl couldn't be happier to put those days behind him. Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien and Bishop Mitchell T. Rozanski dedicated a new faith formation center Oct. 3 that will provide much-needed space for the growing 1,000-family parish in Howard County.

The 11,000-square foot facility, designed by DCMM Architects of Gaithersburg and constructed by Bruchey Builders of Frederick, features classrooms, meeting space and a 40-seat daily Mass chapel that will also be used for adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

"It's a really big step forward for the parish," Father Diehl said. "It gives us so many more opportunities to welcome people for religious education and social events."

Tim Morris, chair of the building committee, noted that groups like the Boy Scouts, senior citizens, the Knights of Columbus and others will benefit from the additional space.

"We built this for the future and the future is the children and their education," Morris said. "It gives them decent classrooms so they can learn about their religion. It also helps with all the social things we have here."

Father Diehl and Morris noted that parishioners showed great support for the project. A capital campaign raised nearly \$2 million.

"In the worst of economic times, we've manage to raise the funds we needed," Morris said.

The building was designed to allow for a second floor to be added if the parish continues growing. There are approximately 450 children enrolled in religious education.

Father Diehl said the next project will be a new church.

"That's down the road," he said. "Realistically, it's probably eight to 10 years away."