

Basilica rector takes steps to boost parishioner involvement

As Father Jeffrey S. Dausess settles into his new position as rector of Baltimore's basilica, the 44-year-old Baltimore native already has plans to bolster parish life at the nation's first Catholic cathedral.

Since assuming the rector's post Feb. 1, Father Dausess has hosted two listening sessions at the 500-family Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"What I came away with from those meetings was that parishioners want a stronger sense of community here," he said.

By fall of 2008, Father Dausess hopes to have a parish council seated to boost parishioner involvement.

The council was disbanded when the basilica was closed in 2004 for a \$32 million restoration.

The parish council wasn't immediately re-established when the landmark church reopened in 2006, because then-Rector Monsignor James V. Hobbs was uncertain when he would retire, and believed the new council should be empanelled under the direction of his successor.

Father Dausess also wants to set up a Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program at the basilica to help those who wish to join the Catholic Church.

Parishioners expressed an interest in finding a place for larger social gatherings near the church, and the new rector has already been granted space in the Mount Vernon Hotel for parish functions that can't be accommodated inside of the basilica.

"There really isn't a space in the church for these kinds of functions, so that has solved that first hurdle," he said. "We're also checking into some other places to use, like in the new My Sister's Place," which is currently being renovated and is set to

open soon next to the basilica.

Engaging the parishioners to become more active as a faith community is a challenge for a parish like the basilica, whose regular worshipers live all over the Baltimore metropolitan area, Father Dausés said.

But unifying parishioners is a goal he intends to accomplish.

“It’s an exciting time now that the renovations are done,” said Father Dausés, who was ordained in 1990 and most recently served as pastor of Church of the Holy Apostles, Gambrills. “There is a connection not only to the history of this very spiritual place. As a faith community, we’re also a part of the basilica’s future.”