

'Beautiful liturgy' highlights St. Pius X renovations

Jim Burke walked through a foot of snow down York Road to be at the first Mass celebrated at St. Pius X, Rodgers Forge, in 1958.

When Archbishop Edwin F. O'Brien celebrated a Mass that dedicated the parish's new altar and blessed renovations to the church Nov. 28, Burke was there again. Only this time, he was with his wife, Anne, to share the experience.

"What I saw tonight was worth the wait," Jim Burke said.

The Mass brought together hundreds of current and former parishioners for what the archbishop called a "beautiful liturgy."

"You're not going to see this again for a long time," he said. "The liturgy does speak for itself, doesn't it? Every movement is full of deep, sacramental meaning and has been so thousands of years."

The parish celebrated Masses in its downstairs church since June. Carol J. Pacione, pastoral associate for St. Pius, said the cost of all the renovations was \$1.8 million and the church has raised \$2.3 million, with added changes to the school gym and the lower church.

At the beginning of the Mass, Pacione told parishioners "there is no question this place is our place, dedicated to the glory of God. We the people of St. Pius X have built, and now refurbished, this place so that all who travel up and down York Road might know that we are a community who gives all praise and glory to God."

During Mass, the archbishop placed relics of St. Victoria into an aperture in the back of the new altar.

Then, wearing a special apron called a gremiale, the archbishop anointed the altar with sacred chrism oil with his hands. The anointing with chrism makes the altar a symbol of Christ.

The archbishop then incensed the altar and the people at Mass.

Parishioners wiped the altar clean and covered it with linens, leading to a lighting of the altar and a new, arching reredos.

“It was incredible,” Pacione said afterward of the blessing and dedication.

Archbishop O’Brien reminded parishioners to be thankful of Pacione’s leadership during such growth, which led to a standing ovation.

Later, during his homily, he said the renovations were a result of parishioners’ love of Mass and the Eucharist.

“Surely, God does not need a house, but we need God to need a house,” the archbishop said. “Every time you enter this church, you enter a space and time different from everyday life, where you can anticipate and even enter into the eternal life God offers us in the liturgy. Every time you celebrate this Eucharist, Christ himself repeatedly steps into time and space to be with us body, soul and divinity.”

Anne Burke was part of a 12-person committee that assisted in the planning on the renovations.

“It’s very encouraging,” Anne Burke said of the results. “Your faith is just made so much stronger and deeper with this kind of experience.”

Marble from the original high altar was placed in the new altar and ambo. The Chi Rho marble symbol from the altar was placed in the reredos.

A new tabernacle was also installed.

A handicap-accessible memorial chapel for daily Mass was created behind the reredos in the former sanctuary. The upper sections of the chapel’s wainscoting have eight different cross designs with names of people remembered in prayer.

Old parishioner favorites have been moved in the church. The baptismal font has been placed at the front, while the sanctuary lamp is now to the left of the altar. The crucifix and pews were cleaned, while the pews also were stained to match the

wainscot and re-installed.

The building also received new floors, carpets, lights, paint and improved sound system.

School Sister of Notre Dame Patricia McCarron, headmistress of Notre Dame Preparatory School in Towson, returned to the parish where she grew up and attended school.

She said that even as the parish evolves, it remains true to its purpose.

“As the years have gone on and time has changed, you see some of the faces of the people who were here from the very beginning to the people who are newer to the parish,” Sister Patricia said. “You just see that goodness of people.”