

‘Richly Blessed’: St. Lawrence Martyr opens new parish complex

HANOVER – While a church being replaced with a beerhall is sadly not uncommon in this day and age, the reverse is newsworthy.

Thanks to population growth in the area, St. Lawrence Martyr Parish in Jessup found it necessary to build a new worship space and parish center, and found the required land for the endeavor at the former site of Blob’s Park, a German beer- and dancehall opened in 1933 by German immigrants. The Blobs also happened to be parishioners of St. Lawrence Martyr, which was established in 1866.

“What a joyous day this is,” said Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori, who celebrated the first Mass in the new space June 3, and blessed it as well as the baptismal font, altar, tabernacle and ambry.

The archbishop, who was the main celebrant, was joined by Trinitarian Father Victor Scocco, pastor of St. Lawrence, associate pastor Trinitarian Father Binay Akkalayil and other priests from the Trinitarians’ Immaculate Heart of Mary Province, including the provincial, Trinitarian Father William Axe.

As has been the custom at other high-profile parish events since the archdiocesan pastorate planning process has been underway, pastors from neighboring parishes also participated in the Mass.

“In fact, there are so many priests here today, I wonder if Mass is being said anywhere else in the archdiocese,” Archbishop Lori joked.

The first reading at the vigil of Pentecost Sunday told the story of the Tower of Babel, in which God scuttled humankind’s self-glorification with the ultimate communication breakdown.

While a “cautionary tale” that may certainly apply to building projects, the archbishop noted in his homily, “from the start, under the loving guidance of Father Scocco, this project was undertaken to glorify God.”

Furthermore, it came in under the \$4.3 million budget, according to Michael Levesque, a fourth-generation parishioner whose German-immigrant great-grandparents are buried at the cemetery at the original church building.

The historic church, which was completed in 1866, is located off State Route 175, on the western side of the Baltimore-Washington Parkway, approximately one mile from the new church, which is on the eastern side of the parkway.

"I am excited," said Levesque, who is also the parish historian and facilities manager, "though I did have some apprehensions."

Those, he said, were related to his attachment to the historic church, which he was happy to note would still be used for daily Masses and would remain available for baptisms, weddings and funerals.

Parishioner Kay Stringfellow called the new space "great," noting the increased office space and classrooms for religious education would serve the community well.

Andrew Furth, a parishioner and recorder for Knights of Columbus Father Bernard Harding Council, named for St. Lawrence's first Trinitarian pastor, pointed out that "just the worship space is more than twice that of the historic church."

Bright and airy, the new complex includes the stations of the cross from the historic church as well as the parish's original bell, which has sat in storage since 1968, when the old "tower was in danger of falling down," according to Levesque.

Parish secretary Cathy Stegmaier, who has facilitated much of the building activity, said she was "so happy to see (the new church) come to completion, and so excited to see what the future will bring."

"We're going to have a lot more opportunity to reach out to others," she said.

St. Lawrence has a particularly active Gabriel Network program, which provides free and confidential support to women facing crisis pregnancies.

The Trinitarian Third Order – a lay order in which members consecrate themselves to the Trinity and minister to the poor, sick and marginalized – is also a fixture at the

parish.

St. Lawrence parishioners include newcomers and those whose family histories intersect with the parish, including 93-year-old Barbara Vogel, whose father, Henry Sellner, was one of the early parishioners of St. Lawrence Martyr.

“I tell you, I’m glad that the Lord let me live to be 93 to see this,” she said following the Mass, after both laughing and crying.

“All of these people – everybody – contribute to making gifts of themselves in dozens and dozens of ways,” Father Scocco said of his parishioners. “It’s a parish richly blessed.”

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