

Father Greenan Hall/Kitchen Renovation

In the Wakefield/Peace Dale area poverty does exist. There are a number of organizations in the area that do their part to meet the needs of others: Welcome House (homeless), Emergency Warm Centers, Jonny Cakes, Community Action Agencies, church-based food programs, and so on.

Our St. Francis of Assisi conference of St. Vincent De Paul Society (SVDS) has been operating out the Peace Dale Congregational Church to cook, prepare, and deliver meals with over 70 volunteers. Currently, they are up to 300 meals; 192 of those are delivered-25% of those are our parishioners. And the numbers are increasing...

Our SVDS did approach me last year and told me that they were outgrowing the capacity to cook and prepare meals at the PCC. They had the idea to move their operations to our Fr. Greenan Hall and if St Francis would explore the idea renovating the kitchen. I was open to the idea of renovating the kitchen since the implications impact not only our parishioners but also people in the surrounding communities.

Also, I knew that we needed to bring up the Kitchen to safety standards. There is a violation with the stove where the flames were scorching the end of the counter top. Also, I was suggested that we should have a fire suppression system in the kitchen which we are currently lacking.

The merits of this Project were discussed and vetted by our Finance/Parish Councils along with the Diocese of Providence.

Craig Marciniak from the SVDS recently went down to New Jersey to learn what Jon Bon Jovi (singing artist) and his wife Dorothea are doing in the economically challenged areas. They set up nice restaurants in a variety of areas -they have a certified chef, put out a quality meal. People come together on a regular basis to share a meal together. Seating at the tables is arranged where you will sit with someone you do not know to get to know them. They charge a certain amount for the meal and for those who do not have the money, they sign up for service; setting the tables up or cleaning, Etc.

I was thinking of how St. Francis of Assisi can adopt this model. I know people love to go out and eat every Saturday night. As one example of possible events, dinner can be provided in the Hall every Saturday night. Reach out and invite members of our community (through various organizations) and share a meal with them. Those who cannot pay can sign up for service.

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This is a way of building up fellowship/relationships our neighbors, a bridge to connect with our neighbors – do we really know our neighbors?

The path here is for those who cannot pay for a meal to sign up for service and also at some point be introduced to the various ministries we have here at our parish with the hope of getting people involved/engaged in our parish, and also with the hopes of some joining our RCIA program -coming into our parish family.

All of this ties into a welcoming committee that we are looking to put together at our parish to welcome those young families and others who are registering in our parish. I think it is vital for them to feel connected to their parish – to feel like they belong. The events that we have at the Hall can easily be included as a means of welcoming our new parishioners and getting them involved with their parish.

Also, we are also looking to re-build our youth programs/ministry. Here too, the events at the Hall can help in this endeavor. We can use our youth to help with a weekly dinner program or use the time they put in for their community service hours. But more than that they can feel connected to their parish – to nourish a sense of belonging.

The goal is not just to renovate our kitchen but to put into place a “Mission Driven Kitchen” that will be used as a tool in building up our parish in a number of ways – to take the great initiatives here already in place, the great ministries here and evermore embed them in our parish mission statement which includes the following. “To serve all of our brothers & sisters, especially the poor, the neglected, and the needy in our local community. To educate and prepare our members to be disciples of Jesus, eager to follow him and exercise their gifts from God to build the Church, the Body of Christ.”

The Diocese has given us a green light to go ahead with the project and we have approval to raise up to \$410,000. The cost of the project is anticipated to come in lower than that. From the start, one of the requirements from the Diocese was that we would need to hire an Architect/Engineer for the project (lowest bid came in at 28,000). I did initiate sending out just a limited number of letters to parishioners back in December to create more awareness about the kitchen project, to test the waters, and to see if we could get the funds to cover the expense for the blueprints. We had to do a limited mailing since this was not a capital campaign and the Catholic Charity Appeal Drive mailing campaign was going to start up in January. From our initial mailing, we brought in over 40K and that allowed us to get the ball rolling.

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We have set up a fundraising committee for this Project. We have experienced members on this committee whose job it is to come up with fundraising ideas and make recommendations for events to be held in the upcoming months ahead. St Francis Parish has saved sufficient funds over the years but the intention is to hold those reserves for rainy days, emergencies, and repairs as much as possible.

I do ask for your support for this Kitchen Renovation Project. Any and all donations are welcome! However, I ask for your support for the good of our parish, to lay a foundation for this parish, a parish that does not look behind, but one that looks ahead, seeking new innovative ways to extend our Catholic faith to others in world that is ever-changing, to really show others what is really in the heart of a Catholic, to show others what it means to put faith into action, to position this parish to meet the current and future needs of our parishioners and our neighbors, and to do it in a prudent, discerning and compassionate way.

We are looking to renovate more than a kitchen at St. Francis of Assisi Parish Family, we are looking to “Renovate Hearts.”

Sincerely,

Fr. Albert Ranallo/Pastor