

July 21st 2026

To the parishioners of St. John the Baptist Church

Dear parishioners,

Among the many joys I have discovered in my two-year tenure of administration among you is to see the successful conclusions of so many projects congruent to the health and well being of this parish. Last year we were blessed to install a new organ which has aided tremendously in the enhancement of divine worship, as well as improvements to the sidewalks and parish hall. I thank one and all who have helped make these improvements possible. None of this could be done without you!

This year we will “keep the ball rolling” by advancing more popular initiatives. For one, we are planning to replace the shingle roof of the church with a metal one. Our wind-blasted (or wind-blessed) hill makes us vulnerable to high winds, which have swept many a shingle from our roof. The roof has been in need of replacement for some time, not just because of missing shingles either: it has simply reached the end of its life. A new metal roof (green, to match the hall) will absolve us from such issues. This will solve the issue of wind damage and flying shingles, and will look handsome besides (Sacred Heart Church in Pomeroy, of a similar design and age to our St. John’s, has a new metal roof which looks very nice, so we will hardly be alone among churches in the diocese making this switch). Additionally (speaking of weathering), the sandstone will be treated with a partial-sealing and cleaning this August, with work beginning after the picnic. We have already accepted a bid from Mr. Dennis Ward, who I am sure will do a fine job for us.

Another issue is the question of restroom facilities for the parish church. While this issue seemed to me immediately pressing as soon as I arrived at St. John’s for the first time, this need was confirmed to me by parishioners who all too readily pointed out the impracticability of having to leave church, descend a long flight of outdoor steps, cross the street (which is somewhat treacherous for pedestrians, due to the bending of the road), enter the parish hall, and transverse the length of the building in order to find relief and avoid an accident. Of course, this feat is much more difficult for an aged, infirm, or handicapped adult, and not easy either for small children. For this reason, we will be converting the room that is currently being used as a confessional into a family restroom, complete with changing facilities for our growing population of “church mice,” that is to say, the little ones who are both the joy and future of our parish.

While someone brought up the question of instead building an “outhouse” on the hill, rather than having a conventional restroom in the church, this solution, while somewhat more advantageous in some ways to the current situation, still does not account for the fact that it sometimes does rain in Miltonsburg, and that it sometimes also does snow, and that cold and wet conditions, together with the difficult front steps, would make this journey arduous and difficult for some parishioners for reasons I just mentioned.

When I brought this issue to a meeting of parishioners last year, different perspectives were shared. Of course, as a parish family, while we sometimes disagree on issues, we all love our parish church and want what is best for it. Discussion is helpful to understand where people are coming from.

It became clear to me during and after this meeting that we would need to move forward with the restroom project, in no small part due to the multiple parishioners who approached me repeatedly about this issue.

For those who have reservations on how the inclusion of a restroom might be disruptive to worship at St. John’s, I am certain that this change can be done in such a way that as to make any potential disruption negligible, since the door to the current confessional room opens to a hallway from the back of the church, which can be further altered to dampen noise and increase privacy by, for example, the addition of a separating curtain dividing the entrance to the hall from the main body of the church, and can be made in such a way to match the curtains on the new confessional.

To compensate for the loss of the confessional room, we are contracting with the new College of St. Joseph the Worker in Steubenville to build us a beautiful new confessional. Mr. John Paul Anthony, the project manager, is an accomplished master carpenter whose designs I am happy to share with you (**please see posted in the back of St. John's church**). As you are and will be able to see, the new confessional will perfectly complement the stunningly beautiful Josephinum altars which have graced our sanctuary since days before living memory.

I do realize that these projects will cost us something... and by *us*, I mean particularly *you* good people. It is your money, after all! And besides, you might say, we already have so many projects going on. Why should we be doing this? Won't this be expensive?

Well, first of all, the building projects (the new roof and sandstone repairs) will use money which is already in our savings accounts and building fund. Such funds exist for the purposes which we will use them for. As for the restroom project, **it is being entirely funded by a single generous parishioner who wishes to remain anonymous**. The fact that this project has but one donor says more about the generosity of the parishioner in question than the project's popularity, which indeed has wide support. I would not proceed with it unless I believe it did. It has, furthermore, the support of the Diocese, which sees it as a project that reflects our evolving needs and will increase the longevity of this community with appropriate, handicap accessible, and up-to-date restroom facilities.

The confessional project is also mostly funded at this point through individual donations. More than half of the funding for this project has thus far been provided by a handful of generous parishioners who are, like me, overwhelmingly excited about this practical and aesthetically pleasing addition to our worship space. Those of you who are excited for this project, and have voiced their approval for the related restroom project, can still donate. My intention for this project, like the organ project, is not to have to use parish savings, though I believe the project to be important enough to necessitate it if need be.

Work on the confessional will begin as soon as practicable. We already have the necessary funds to begin, since the master carpenter only requires "half up-front" to commence work. Work on the restroom will commence as soon as we receive the results of our soil sample testing. For this project to move forward, we will need to know how much space we will need to mark off behind the church (the north side, between the two cemeteries) for a leech field for the new septic tank. I am working with contractors and the Monroe Co. Health Dpt. to schedule these tests as soon as can be done.

From the bottom of my heart, I am deeply humbled by the confidence you have placed in me so far as your priest and administrator these past two years. Changes, while exciting, can also be daunting; you have all, for the most part, lived and prayed in this parish much longer than I, and are accustomed to a certain way of doing things. I do not wish to be mistaken: I don't wish to come across as one who sees nothing but problems to be fixed in Miltonsburg. You have all clearly accomplished so much in the long history of your little parish. Its survival in this troubled time in the Church, and its clear vitality as a community of believers, are all signs to me of the good things that St. John's has going on, thanks to you and to the grace of God.

As Jesus says to his disciples, "You have faith in God, have faith also in me! (John 14:1)" I for one have faith that all of these projects will only make our dear little church more so what it already is: a blessed place where God can be worshipped in beauty and in truth, and where we, His children, can gather together as one family of believers in faith and love.

God bless you all,

In Christ,

Fr. Nick