

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As you come to Mass this weekend, you'll notice some additions to the exterior of Saint Mary's church building. After an initial review by our people and by the representative of Buildings and Properties from the Archdiocese, we decided to get a professional engineering survey. We contracted with the structural engineers, MS&A out of Hagerstown who conducted a preliminary onsite review for the purposes of inspecting and assessing the structural integrity of the church building. This review revealed some areas of grave concern. The preliminary results are explained below but I am quick to point out that we can continue to use the building even as the scope and breadth of the needed repairs are still being determined.

The bell tower is in significant trouble. Recent wind storms tore away several pieces of wood framing from the structure. This exposed the bell tower to the elements, allowing water and moisture to deteriorate the remaining structure.



The inspection also determined that, over time, the bell tower has started to pull away from the back of the church building. The structure has shifted significant enough that it has created a fall hazard from above. Until we can investigate further, a temporary tunnel of scaffolding has been put in place to protect from the potential hazard of falling bricks and mortar. The tunnel will still allow us to use the back entrance as it provides our only (if still limited) access for those unable to use the stairs in front of the building.



The shifting of the bell tower prompted the engineer to examine more closely the foundation of the church building itself as well. He discovered that, at some point in the distant past, a hole was cut in one of the foundation walls. This has undermined that part of the foundation. We will need to fill the hole and rebuild the foundation. The interior of the church building also needs some work. The choir loft does not have enough structural support and we will need to add additional supports to ensure the safety of anyone using the choir loft. This will involve closing the choir loft until we can be sure of the proper support. In addition, the envelope of the building is no longer sealed, allowing water and moisture to invade the interior which has already caused significant and continuing damage. The probable causes



are the roof, the windows, and the brickwork where the paint has come away causing the bricks themselves to deteriorate. We will need to work on sealing the outside of the Church.

All of these challenges point to a great deal of repair that will take a great deal of money over a long period of time. It must be done, and it will take us a while to accomplish all that needs to be done. We have already commissioned a second, more intensive analysis that will examine all areas of the building in depth. It will take several months to complete as it will necessarily involve the use of cranes (for the bell tower) and the digging up of at least part of the foundation. Once completed, the report will help us to determine what needs to be done, and how and in what order we should make the necessary repairs. I wanted to share all of this with you as I am sure that the temporary fixes will prompt speculation and, among some, fear. The engineer has assured us that the building is safe to use; however, these are needed repairs to ensure that the deterioration does not worsen.

This building represents a part of our history and will serve us long into the future. It cannot, though, be the sum total of our outreach nor even the primary focus of our community. Our community has always been and continues to be broader than the buildings that house our worship. We are called by Christ as a community to reach out to those around us. The call of Jesus Christ and the mission He gives us must be front and center. I look forward to God's help in all of these things.

In the Risen Lord,

