

Dear Friends,

Fr. Jerry asked me to write a letter this week about the parish's proposed exploration to build a new youth center, formally called the **St. Isidore Parish Center for Youth Catechesis**. As I sit at my computer, thinking about what I should say, the first thing that strikes me is to recognize the many leaders of this parish who have demonstrated extraordinary care for the religious development of our young people. Because of their constant recommendation that we better the religious formation of our young people, I humbly began to investigate, and ultimately to develop, a proposal for our parish youth ministry that includes a new youth center.

It is important to clarify some terms that I just used. **Youth Ministry**. Sometimes "youth ministry," gets reduced to "youth group," and maybe a couple of retreats. A *Youth Group* is a single program offered by a church. *Youth Ministry* is a collection of approaches, groups, programs, and relationships in a parish community that cares for and stimulates the growth of a young person into the life of the Catholic Faith Community.

If a parish is going to have such a collection of programs for youth, a responsible approach means that the parish will identify and house those programs. As parish leadership and I began to look at the needs of our parish youth ministry programs, we realized that we are currently offering programs for youth in which their needs weren't even being met. For example, we currently have 350 parishioners in grades 7-9 who meet in 40 formation groups, but do not have a formal place to gather. These formation groups may not be a part of the "youth group" but they are part of our "youth ministry," and our parish is responsible for these youth programs.

What was even more astounding to me, was to discover the total number of youth we could potentially serve in a vibrant youth ministry program. There are 1650 youth in this parish. That's right! 1650 adolescent parishioners between grades 7 and 12 are registered. "How can we create a program to meet the needs to develop their religious values when we don't even have space for the 350?" I began to ask. They need a space to meet just like a basketball team needs a court to practice on, or musicians need a place where they can make the noise that eventually harmonizes into a symphony.

"There must be another solution," I thought. I began to ask the question. "What if our parish actually gave first preference to youth ministry for use of our current facilities?" With 40 classes that need space and the need to develop programs for the other 1300 youth, it would mean that such a decision would kick out important parish programs including adult formation, athletics, science fairs, service groups, addiction healing, support for the poor, prayer groups, and so forth. It became apparent that the pursuit of a center for youth catechesis was not a vain pursuit, but one we needed to address to serve the needs of entire parish community, not just the youth.

And so we began searching, giving regular reports back to the Parish Council, and recently to the Finance Council. After both councils responded with encouragement and recognized the initial merits of the proposal, I am pleased to echo Fr. Jerry's invitation to

a **Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, May 12 at 7:00 PM in the Ministry Center Gymnasium** to review the proposal. The meeting will review the financial, building, and programming proposals for the *St. Isidore Center for Youth Catechesis*, which will be located at 78 Stratford Dr. (where the Honey Baked Ham store once was). Your attendance at the meeting is vital for us to make a good decision on the matter. We need to hear directly about the needs of our youth, while also taking into account our limited resources. A decision informed by wisdom can be reached, and for that, we need diligent prayer, and everyone's voice.

I reiterate to you what I have been told repeatedly by Fr. Jerry. We are only exploring the possibility of building this youth center and remain uncommitted until we are certain that we have the financial resources in place to make a commitment. In pursuing funding for such a center, we are making no demands on the operating budget of the parish, but rather, we are soliciting individual and corporate sponsors.

I hope you will bring forward your input, questions, and comments to me at any time about this proposal and look forward to seeing you at the Town Hall meeting! May God continue to bless you!

In Christ,

David Heimann, M.Div.
Director of Youth Ministry