

September 28, 2015

+ St Lorenzo Ruiz, martyr of the Philippines

Dear parishioners,

Since I arrived in Assumption Parish last year, St Gerard's has been an issue on the "front burner". The building was neglected over the years. On Nov 1, 2014 our Parish held a successful fundraiser to help repair the perimeter drainage. This event even attracted some people who are not actually practicing their faith regularly. It was a joyous occasion, and a great effort was made by many. One man said to me, "This (event) shows what Powell River is really like". What he said was true: ours is a community with passion, and a sense of fun.

Last summer I called for a seismic/building committee to be formed. During our initial meeting it was proposed to me that once the drainage repairs at St Gerard's were done, we should undertake a study of this structure's use in our Parish community. I was told, "This community cannot support two churches. Do what you need to fix it, and then assess the pastoral need of the building". This seemed the prudent way to go. Some parishioners wrote me letters, expressing that it was time to say goodbye to St Gerard's.

Earlier this year I asked for a group of long standing parishioners to write up a survey about St Gerard's. Over a five month period, the St Gerard' study committee undertook a great deal of work, under difficult circumstances. Assimilating all the data from the responses was a huge job. The final report included considerable research in many areas. We owe these generous individuals of the St Gerard's study our deepest thanks. The final report actually details what is happening in the broader situation of our Parish: our Parish demographics on the wane, our financial situation that is ever more stressed. None of us can ignore these realities.

The report suggests that the combined stresses on our Assumption community underscore the central issue: can our community of aging parishioners sustain St Gerard's in future years? This question becomes more complicated, when we consider the seismic needs of our structures. We should treat this report with the respect that is its due. Please do read it! It will be posted on the website in the near future, along with the Archbishop's directive and this very letter you are reading.

Archbishop Miller has suggested that the parish wait for a five year period, during which the parish can regularly assess the needs of the Assumption property, and the expenses of running St Gerard's. I would never want to rush such a major decision at any rate.

The possible loss of St Gerard's got people motivated. A new garden was planted, people volunteered to do maintenance on the property, some volunteer painters gave the exterior stucco a new lustre. Enough money was raised to install eight new windows (to be installed in November), and to paint the window frames, doors, and flashing. The new 8 am mass time became popular, and suited people's schedules. Most importantly, a regular Rosary and tea for the Wildwood seniors, youth gatherings, and what I believe to be true, home spun evangelizing, began to happen there.

It dawned on me: given that our current resources will not allow the Parish to pay for needed repairs (notably, saving for a 25,000 new roof, needed by 2020); and given that we have a five year time frame, the supporters of St Gerard's could organize fundraisers. New gardens and painting are good, but the structure needs more. If the supporters of St Gerard's can commit to doing regular fund raisers – there

could be a hope for preserving this building. So my approach is: if those who desire to keep St Gerard's can get motivated, and then propose to the Pastor and Pastoral Council various fundraisers (bake sales, pasta dinners such as we are having on October 16, pub nights, card nights, dinner and dances, and the like); and if they raise funds we could put aside for the new roof, then the decision in five years could be favourable to St Gerard's.

If people are not able to do this, we all know what that will eventually mean: the Parish may well be forced to sell the property, on account of its many and increasing needs.

I need to focus my energies on some other parish matters. Notably: our Parish elementary school's seismic preparedness. The Archbishop expects me to encourage seismic awareness, and to pursue seismic retrofitting of our structures. This task is so big that it defies description. But we have to begin somewhere. The big one is coming, and we have to do what we can, no matter how small, to be prepared.

My first task is to raise funds, so that we can have a detailed, seismic plan for retrofitting the gym. This is the most urgent part of our school structure to be retrofitted. I have given St Gerard's supporters the go-ahead to arrange fundraisers in consultation with myself, and with the Parish pastoral council. But I am the pastor of the school children, and the employer of the teaching staff. I am announcing in this letter that I invite parishioners to join with me in preparing a gala Dinner/Dance and Auction Evening for April 16, 2016. Yes, yet another committee needs to be formed! The proceeds of this event will go toward paying for the structural architect's plan for the gym.

I am going to St Gerard's shrine in Italy next month: I want to thank him for all the blessings he has shown us in this Parish. With Mary and St Joseph Gerard Majella is one of our three patrons. I will be going to express your prayers of gratitude, for past and present blessings. Given that he is the patron saint of mothers, I will bring the prayers of Assumption mothers with me to Materdomini, Avellino.

Thank you for reading my letter, but more importantly thank you for participating in the life of Assumption, and keeping us alive in the Spirit!

Fr Patrick Tepoorten,
Pastor,
Church of the Assumption Parish