The Future of The Basilica

Planning for our space needs

BY KATHY ANDRUS

As we continue to celebrate 150 years as a parish we have many events, activities, and exhibits to look back on the rich history of The Basilica. Throughout that time we have had many leaders, both lay and ordained, who have guided and directed our parish growth, becoming a “beacon of hope” in our community. Looking back gives us the inspiration and courage to look ahead and plan for the next 150 years.

One year ago, The Basilica of Saint Mary, with the support of The Basilica Landmark, established the Campus Space Planning Committee. The team represents our broad parish community and is comprised of individuals of all ages, representative ministries, and views of church in the 21st century.

Under the guidance of Fr. Gilbert Sunghera, S.J., our space planning consultant, we have been working to reimagine our campus spaces and create a vision for the future and a plan that supports that vision. Fr. Sunghera, an architectural designer and associate professor of Architecture at the University of Detroit Mercy, has been our teacher, our subject matter expert, and even our tour guide as we visited spaces around the Twin Cities with architectural and design elements that feature creative use of space, light, and materials.

At an early meeting Fr. Bauer posed three questions to each team member: “Why did you come here? Why did you come back? Why do you keep coming back?” Our responses to those questions started a robust discussion. We participated in a series of exercises that looked at the church in connection to the city, considered transitions into sacred space, identified accessibility constraints throughout the campus, and explored what church means to each generation. This resulted in a vision statement for the project that established the framework for our work.

A Selection Committee was established as a subset of the larger group, which this past Fall developed a Request for Qualifications (RFQs) that was sent out to about 50 firms. Many of those firms participated in a comprehensive tour of our facilities. We screened the responses using criteria we had developed, ranked the submissions, and...
The Campus Space Planning Committee visited architectural spaces and reviewed design elements.
and invited six firms to move forward in the process. Those firms were invited to visit our campus again in December for an on-site experience. Requests for Proposals (RFPs) were sent out after the visit and the response deadline was January 31. The RFP asked firms to collaborate with other partners so their responses reflected expertise in design, preservation, and urban/landscape planning. Some proposals included broader resources as well. We received six strong team submittals outlining an ambitious vision for our future campus. After an in-depth review and ranking of the proposals, three teams were selected for interviews by the Selection Committee.

It’s an exciting time in the life of our parish. We look forward to the weeks and months ahead as we continue to gather information and explore possibilities for our Basilica Landmark.+

Kathy Andrus is the chair of the Campus Space Planning Committee and has been a parishioner since 2007.

A CONVERSATION WITH FR. GILBERT

Q: Why is it important for the project to have a vision statement?
A: The Campus Space Planning Committee was charged with looking at the whole campus and how it works for the current congregation. A century ago, The Basilica was surrounded by a close-knit walkable neighborhood, stores and business dotted Hennepin Avenue, and streets aligned. As our parish prepares for its next 150 years at this location, The Basilica needs to respond to the changing needs of the community. The vision statement articulates the goals and aspirations of our community. The vision statement makes it easier to determine what is needed, what are the priorities, and helps us communicate to the chosen design team the expectations we have for the design they develop.

Q: What excites you about the project?
A: The Basilica is a gorgeous landmark with an incredible liturgical life. Its stature gives it power in the urban landscape, resonating a sphere of influence on the larger civic life beyond our campus. The vision of building an inclusive community has the ability to touch the lives of the broader community to reflect a sense of the City on the Hill, the New Jerusalem. This environment has the potential of providing refuge for elderly escaping loneliness, young adults finding a place to unplug and discover community, the homeless finding a home. This master plan has the potential to help Minneapolis revive an urban fabric fractured by the insertion of the interstate, and strive for a more humane animation of the surrounding neighborhood.

Q: What are the next steps in the project?
A: Once a design team is under contract, they will start deeper conversations with multiple constituents to realize this vision statement for the whole campus, and generate conversations with surrounding institutions to strategize how to rebuild our neighborhood. They will dig into the practical aspects for restoring the original beauty of the worship space while bringing it to current liturgical practice, accessibility standards, and to enhance the celebration of all the arts. They will study how contemporary culture gathers and transitions into the sacred, and look at highest and best use of the various spaces on the campus given the needs of the breadth of ministries.

A fundraising consultant will also assess the capacity this community has to gather the funds needed to implement the vision. Parish leadership will embark on educational elements related to current liturgical needs, emerging art form, and even modern urban planning principles. Future opportunities will insure that the diverse voices of our community will be heard and that we as a parish meet the needs of the current and future generations who will worship and be served for the next 150 years.