

The Renovation of St. Augustine's Church, Lethbridge

Parishioner Tim Pope reports

In the new year St. Augustine's Church in Lethbridge will become significantly more accessible, thanks to a new addition at the west entrance. Before the addition St. Augustine's Church consisted of two buildings, the Sanctuary, built in 1956 and the older Church Hall. The structures shared a courtyard and were connected by an open air breezeway. The two buildings had several different floor levels between them making accessibility very difficult. To accommodate the barrier free access that the congregation identified in 2011 as the primary renovation need, the 2013 architectural design called for a new west addition to be built. With its new brickwork perfectly matching the old and its large windows looking onto the street, "the new addition is faithful to the original building but softens its austere appearance," explains Elizabeth Songer, project architect and church member. The addition expands the Narthex eight feet, and extends south one hundred and fifty feet to connect to the Hall. The result will be not only easier access but also, a far more attractive gathering place, joining the church and the hall together in a beautiful glassed-in entrance space. It will also mean that children going to their Sunday School classes in the Hall will not have to go outside during the winter months. Stained glass windows from the former parish church of St. Mary-the-Virgin, which merged with St. Augustine's in 2004, will be incorporated and also greatly enhance the beauty of the new church entrance. The addition will also enable the important addition of a prayer room, a quiet and private space for our weekly offering of the ministry of personal prayer following worship services. New landscaping and reconfiguration for the church of the central courtyard will create a more usable and contemplative outdoor space.

Ramp access into the building will help to reduce the challenge of multiple levels in the church. Further help will come from new elevator access to the currently under-utilized balcony and the heavily utilized crypt. For as long as twenty years less mobile church members have wished they could participate in activities in the crypt without having to negotiate the stairs. The crypt plays a central part in the life of the church, being used for, among other things, the coffee hour held after

the 10 a.m. service. Fellowship at St. Augustine's is unthinkable without this weekly time of refreshments and fellowship. The addition of an accessible washroom and renovations to the kitchen and nursery will complete our new barrier-free crypt.

When ground is excavated after sixty years, unforeseen discoveries, perhaps more embarrassing than serious, can always be expected. *Build on the rock! Know where to find living water!*—the Church is known for such sound scriptural exhortations. Imagine the consternation, then, when during the renovations the bell tower was found not to be built on a foundation of any sort, and when contractors ruptured an unsuspected water line that was not marked on any city utilities map. Such discoveries can make a church flock feel quite sheepish. Despite a little unwanted “living water” in the crypt, however, little harm was done and the new structure was able to be re-engineered.

If from the beginning the impetus for this project came from parishioners, the same can be said of the concerted effort to raise the required funds. “A project like this pulls the parish together,” remarks Doug McLaughlin, Building Committee chair. It is with gratefulness to God that we can look back on less than two years of fundraising and already be within sight of reaching the \$1.4m goal, thanks to universal participation in the vision for a more accessible church. Fundraising events will continue until the goal is reached, and all who are friends of St. Augustine's are invited to help us get there. At the same time, our thoughts and our hearts now turn to the ultimate goal of reaching out to a community hitherto hindered from worshipping with us. Canon James Robinson explains:

The primary reason for our new addition is to make St. Augustine's accessible to all. Such a goal is consistent with our call to embody something of the hospitality and welcome of our Lord Jesus Christ who invites everyone into a living relationship with him and his people.

He continues:

I look forward to seeing the return of a number of our elderly to worship services and other celebrations. It is important, though, to remember that the goal of accessibility benefits all generations. For example, I have had

the parent of a child confined to a wheelchair ask me if her child would be able to attend our Vacation Bible School. I had to say “No.” I am thrilled that now I would be able to answer “Yes.”

“Yes” will also be the answer to all who wish to attend the many functions for which the church is booked, whether they be weddings, funerals, concerts, or the Kiwanis Music Festival. Saying an emphatic “Amen” to inclusion and hospitality in a church is surely a proper response to St. Paul’s words:

As surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No.” For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by me and Silas and Timothy, was not “Yes” and “No,” but in him it has always been “Yes.”.... And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God (2 Cor. 1:19f).

Before



After

