

Air Infiltration Project

You have been hearing about air-infiltration and the \$40,000+ bill that will be arriving soon. I thought you might welcome a bit more background and information. As we were preparing to celebrate our first Christmas in our new home, a cold wave with strong winds from the west also joined us for this December feast. We became aware of very cold drafts entering the building and temperatures in the upper 20's and low 30's above the ceiling tiles. The major initial concern was the fire sprinkler system above the ceiling of the church. Would they freeze up and break? We gathered our architect and construction partners who came quickly, crawled all throughout the building, stuffed new insulation in various places, and drained the water from our fire sprinkler system and replaced it with an "anti-freeze" to protect us from freezing damage. That helped us get through Christmas.

Our partners reviewed the construction documents to attempt to identify where this air could be coming from. They crawled into every corner of the building they could to locate the source of the drafts. There was no quick or easy explanation for these drafts. Our situation was presented at various conferences and groups for "new eyes" to identify the problem and solutions. Over the years a variety of strategies were agreed upon by the architect and the parish to resolve the issue. The architect has spent almost \$35,000 to resolve the issue. The parish has purchased materials and provided parishioner labor for other strategies. However the issue was still not completely resolved. The construction partner walked away from the problem and has since gone out of business.

Last summer our architect engaged a consultant who specializes in air-infiltration issues to help resolve our problems. We came up with a new strategy which was tested earlier in the year and found to be successful. This summer contractors completed the work. They found areas in the building where air could easily get in – an inch here or 4 inches there all adds up. We believe the insulation and caulking have finally resolved our problem.

In this last effort we agreed to fix the problem and not look to place blame. We pursued legal action for the construction partner's builder's risk insurance but were advised against it. Additional costs would be created with no guarantees to recover our legal fees or project costs. Since there was no construction partner at the table to share the financial costs for our problem, I agreed the parish would need to do so.

I can certainly understand anger at the parish having to pay to fix a new building but I have learned that "new" does not guarantee there will be no problems. It can happen with a house, a car, a computer, a stove, or a church.

You may be wondering what the big deal is about some drafts in our building. Well freezing our sprinkling system is one major concern. Another is the use of our natural resources. When cold winter winds come into our building, it calls for heat to warm us. Our heat also leaves the building and does nothing to raise the outside temperature. It works the same for air-conditioning in the summer. Doing nothing means more than living with a little discomfort. It means wasting our natural resources and the money to pay for them.

How long will it take to "pay back" our investment? That is a great question. We will begin to create a savings column in the bulletin for our gas and electricity costs as a result of the work done this summer. There is never a good time to pay for such unexpected emergencies. This will deplete our savings from the sale of the Parish Center. I ask for your help once again – to make sacrifices in gratitude for the bounty God has given you and us.

Fr. Don