

# Making Room at our Table

## What is a Gathering Space?

April 17, 2011

The plans being developed by the Planning and Design Committee and architects includes a gathering space as part of the structure. Some people have wondered if we need such a space and even what one is. A gathering space is an area between the entrance of the church and the sanctuary where people can meet before and after church. *Built of Living Stones*, a 2000 document by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, says: "The gathering space (or narthex) is a place of welcome" a threshold space between the congregation's space and the outside environment. "...the gathering space helps believers to make the transition from everyday life to the celebration of the liturgy, and after the liturgy, it helps them return to daily life to live out the mystery that has been celebrated. In the gathering space, people come together to move in procession and to prepare for the celebration of the liturgy." The gathering space is also a place of preparation, for families before a baptism, catechumens, a wedding party or those gathering for a funeral.

As you know, Father Joseph usually stands in the tiny vestibule at the front of the church to greet parishioners before and after Mass. It is unthinkable that people could stop and talk in that space, or even do more than wave at each other as they make their way in and find their pew. Our church is a wonderfully reverent place, and when people enter they are respectful of those who are preparing prayerfully for liturgy. However, our church is also a vibrant community. We, the parish community, are the Body of Christ, invited to full and active participation in the Mass. As we have been singing in our closing hymn during Lent, "Jerusalem My Destiny: let no one walk alone. The journey makes us one." A gathering space encourages people to come together as a community both before and after Mass. It is where we can share a bit of ourselves upon arriving at church, informally share prayer requests, and prepare ourselves and our children for entering the sacred environment of the church.