

Reprint Courtesy of the Fort Worth Star-Telegram

A downtown revival

At least 2 central-city churches are seeing a resurgence and are spending millions to expand, partly in response to a growing population downtown



Plans for St. Patrick Cathedral's new parish hall are shown off in front of the St. Ignatius building by business manager Marguerite Koenig, capital campaign chairman Art Dickerson, architect Raymond O'Connor and the Rev. Richard Flores. STAR-TELEGRAM/RODGER MALLISON

St. Patrick Cathedral on Throckmorton Street in downtown Fort Worth is poised to start a multimillion-dollar expansion project to meet the demands of a growing congregation. To the west, First Presbyterian Church will, after the first of the year, spend additional money to spruce up its parking lots along Summit Avenue, adding lighting and monument signs to make the church's pedestrian entry more pleasant and to tell passers-by that the church is there. This, after the church last year completed a \$15.7 million building project. Unlike some downtown mainline churches across the country that are experiencing membership declines, at least two Fort Worth churches are seeing a resurgence. Even in this down economy, the churches are spending millions to meet needs that a growing congregation brings. Local church representatives say they are responding, in part, to the larger number of people living downtown. "We can see that and we're reacting to that," said Art Dickerson, a member of St. Patrick for more than 40 years who is heading the capital campaign to expand the campus of Fort Worth's first Roman Catholic church. "We're a parish within an urban environment." **A decade's work** In 1997, St. Patrick members raised \$3.4 million to restore the exterior of the 121-year old cathedral as close as possible to its original state. The paint now more nearly matches the limestone underneath, Dickerson said. The project, which involved a complete interior renovation as well, was completed last year after 10 years' work. Now, the parish is raising \$3.5 million to build a two-story parish center at the southwest corner of 12th and Throckmorton streets, across from the gleaming Omni hotel and residential high-rise. The first floor of the new parish center will have a kitchen and enough room to seat 450 people at tables or 750 in auditorium style, and a second floor for parish offices, which will be moved from the basement of the century-old St. Ignatius building on the St. Patrick campus. St. Ignatius was an all-girls school that closed when the sisters opened Our Lady of Victory on the near south side. St. Patrick bought the building in the mid-1950s and has used it for Sunday school classes. Dickerson said plans are to break ground on the parish center in the spring. **'Parish-motivated'** St. Patrick, with a membership of 1,300 families, owns 2.8 acres on the southern edge of downtown. In 1996, church members developed a master plan for the property, and the new parish center is the next step. The property will eventually be connected with special sidewalks and pedestrian crossings to make St. Patrick cohesive. "We want to grow," Dickerson said. "Our plan is to have ministries that we have not been able to offer in the past. This is 100 percent parish-motivated." When an additional \$2.5 million is raised, Dickerson said, the former St. Ignatius Academy will be renovated into a museum and a chapel will be restored. It will also offer storage for the

Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. A building St. Patrick owns at the southwest corner of Texas and Throckmorton streets is being renovated for its religious formation classes, now held at the St. Ignatius building. In addition, a parking garage is planned for property owned at the northeast corner of Jennings Avenue and Texas Street. The church recently leased a building on the lot to the Omni for use as a condo sales showroom. St. Patrick is now making use of the Omni's interior improvements and is holding adult evening religious education classes in the building. Eventually, it might be better renovated for those church functions, Dickerson said. "It's a vision right now," he said. **Build it, they will come** First Presbyterian's membership grew more in 2008 than it had in the previous two decades and is up to about 1,700 members, said Jeremy Agor, the church's communications director. Last year it opened a three-story Great Hall with a worship center, along with meeting and media rooms. As a result, the church expanded its ministries and community programming, he said. Attendance at First Presbyterian's 9 a.m. worship service increased 25 percent in 2008 from 2007, and was up 10 percent at its 11 a.m. service, Agor said. "We have been lucky to see increasing attendance at our Sunday morning services in the past two years," Agor said. "We're still seeing small increases this year. It does help there are more housing opportunities downtown." Now, the church will spend more money to fix the parking lots. A final cost figure hasn't been determined because the work hasn't gone out for bid, Agor said. But the work will begin early next year, he said. "The parking lot has been a bit of an issue for years," Agor said.
SANDRA BAKER, 817-390-7727

If you haven't joined your fellow parishioners yet by donating or making a pledge, payable over as long as four years, to the Parish Center Capital Campaign, now would be a good time to do so, before the end of the year.

Please remember that the Cathedral is a charitable institution and everything you give is tax deductible. Anything given in 2009 will be deductible when you file your 2009 tax return.

Please be as generous as you can.

To those who have donated or pledged, Thank you for your generosity!

**Arthur J. Dickerson
General Chairman
Cathedral Capital Campaign**

CELEBRATING OUR PAST, BUILDING OUR FUTURE