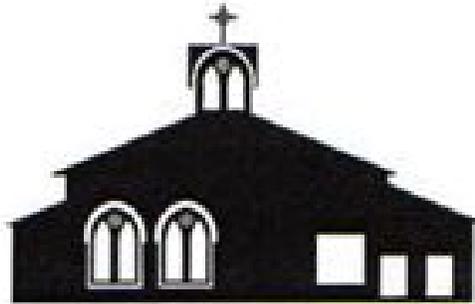


# **St. Johns Building and Grounds Assessment**



**January 2021**

## **Introduction**

In order to help her understand the condition of the buildings and grounds at St. Johns, Mother Minerva requested that a report be prepared assessing the state of the buildings and grounds. This report would serve as a resource for her and the vestry to understand not only the current condition of the building and grounds, but also the problems and opportunities they present. This document was prepared in response to her request.

Hal Hughes  
Jr. Warden

## **Parish Hall**

The parish hall is the first structure built on the property. It began as a simple one-story flat roof building covering approximately the north half of the current Parish Hall building. In 1979, the building had its first major remodeling. The main purpose of this remodeling was to add a small second story area above the center of the building and to move the south wall of that new center section outward to create a vestibule or narthex area for the church itself. The main motivation for this remodel was to add more space to the building and make the building “look like a church.” The construction was done almost entirely by volunteer labor. The roof for this addition took the shape of an “A-Frame” and the second story room was called the “Upper Room.” In 1983, the original south wall on the eastern part of the church building was “bumped out” in order to enclose the porch area. This renovation added about 4-5 feet of width that was used for the organ and the choir and was called the “Choir Porch.” The final major renovation occurred during 1987 and 1988 and produced the building that you see today as the Parish Hall. Since then, minor renovations were done in 2003-2004 to add the folding accordion doors, new floor tile, and moving two interior walls to make a new nursery area. In 2009 the Columbarium was added and in 2013 the City’s Small Business Lighting Program paid 85% of the cost to upgrade all the fluorescent lights. In 2015 the old acoustical ceiling tile were replaced and a new ceiling installed with recessed lights in the dining area.

### **Structure**

There are no signs of cracking in the foundation or walls, and a recent examination by architects noted that the building seems structurally sound. However, when a new outside door was installed in Fay’s office seven or eight years ago substantial termite damage was found in the studs around the door and had to be replaced. Termite inspections were then done for the next few years to make sure there was no new termite damage.

Also, seven or eight years ago, a hailstorm damaged the roof shingles so severely they had to be replaced. Fortunately, the church’s insurance company paid the entire cost for replacing the shingles.

There is substantial damage and rot in the wood siding on the North wall of the building. This side of the building has never been renovated. Thanks, to a recent substantial gift to the church, we are now in the process of hiring a contractor to replace the siding. Depending on the weather and time to get permits, construction should start in early spring and be completed before we begin using the parish hall again.

### **Mechanical**

After each remodel, AC units were added and ductwork added or changed. All of the units are different models, brands, and ages. As a result, the heating and cooling system for the parish hall is “chaotic” as

shown in the photo below. Currently, the system heats and cools adequately but not very efficiently or evenly. The average life of AC units is approximately 12 years and all of the units for the parish hall are older than that so replacement of these units is likely in the near future.



**Parish Hall Attic Air Handling Units**

As shown in the photo on the next page, the utility room is so crowded with equipment that it is likely some ductwork and pipes will have to be temporarily removed in order to replace the water heater.



### **Electrical**

Like the mechanicals, the electrical system has been changed during each remodel. The system is barely adequate, but there are a few outlets that don't work and only one outlet in Fay's office. There are no comprehensive drawings showing the electrical system and any work on the system is an "adventure".

### **Other**

The parish hall is monitored with an alarm system. Originally, the system was hard-wired to the sensors, but sometime within the past few years was changed to a wireless system. The system works well – perhaps too well. A persistent problem with the alarm system is people triggering the alarm accidentally. If the security company is not immediately notified, the alarm is reported to the police. Each false alarm results in a \$100 charge from APD.

We signed a five-year contract two years ago with Brinks Security to reduce our monthly costs and fix our maintenance costs at a fixed level.

## **Sanctuary**

During 2002 and 2003, a discernment process and capital campaign resulted in the plans and funding for a large new church building for St. John's. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the building were held on May 17, 2013 and construction continued through 2003 and 2004. The first service in the new church building was an Evening Prayer service held on August 23, 2004. The first Eucharist was Sunday, August 29 (8:00 AM). Formal dedication of the new building was held on September 12, 2004.

### **Structure**

The sanctuary structure is still comparatively new for a building and does not show any problems. Its structure is unique in one respect: The North and South walls are not structural and were designed so that when or if we decide to enlarge the seating space the walls can be "bumped out" to almost double the seating area without impacting the structural integrity of the building.

Although not exactly a structural problem, the connection between the cross on top of the cupola and the connection between the cupola and roof was not properly flashed and caulked. As a result, there has been persistent leaking which drips between the communion rail and first couple of rows. This problem has been unsuccessfully addressed several times over the past few years. The leak seems to be finally fixed; however, we still watch closely after a heavy rain. When the building is re-roofed (hopefully no sooner than ten or fifteen years from now) the roof structure will need to be examined for water damage and special attention paid to the flashing between the cupola and roof.

### **Mechanical**

The Sanctuary is heated and cooled by a large commercial unit that cools the seating area. Two heat pumps cool and heat the narthex and choir area. The main AC unit for the church has a relatively long life, and unlike the smaller units is not simply removed and replaced, but is more like a car: i.e., parts are replaced as needed. Since its installation, filters have been changed and the unit checked monthly by a filter company.

The units are all over 15 years old now. The average life of units similar to our smaller units is about 12 years, so we can reasonably expect that we will have to replace them in the near future.

### **Electrical**

The lights in the seating area of the sanctuary are too high to be changed without moving pews and having special equipment. Since installation, the lights have been changed twice and cost over

approximately \$1, 000 each time. Fortunately, with the long life of modern lights, this only has to be done every few years.

Recently, however, we have had problems with the lights blinking erratically. Subsequently we found that the problem is the controller (the black box that controls the lighting system). Our system was installed in 2004 and is functionally obsolete. In particular, the four digital control modules in the equipment rack are obsolete and replacement parts are no longer available. When they were still commercially available, the modules cost approximately \$1,100 each, plus the cost of installation. A temporary workaround has been implemented and is adequate for the current situation, but will need to be fixed before we move back into the church. We recently received a proposal to replace the system for \$24,000, but are now looking to see if there are less expensive options.

### **Other**

In addition to the alarm system that is the same as the one in the parish hall, the sanctuary is separately monitored by a fire alarm system. For reasons that are unclear to me, the security alarm companies don't do fire alarm monitoring.

The sanctuary also has a sound system which was installed when the sanctuary was built in 2004. It has been repaired/upgraded several times since. There are five wireless microphone channels, four of which are functional. Two of the wireless channels (including the defective one) are original equipment; the other three are current technology which is incompatible with the older units. This means that we have some wireless microphones that work only with the single working older unit, and others that will work with any of the three newer units.

The auto mixer was replaced/upgraded three or four years ago and is working well. The Equalizer is original equipment from 2004 but is still working well. Three of the five power amplifiers are original equipment; the other two have been replaced in the past five or so years and are working well. However, it is not clear if identical replacement units are still commercially available when/if an amplifier fails.

The speaker systems are original equipment from 2004 and still in good shape. The hearing assistance system works, but it is functionally obsolete and should be replaced to support current generation hearing aid systems that use inductive loop and/or Bluetooth technology. The rack wiring needs to be updated to provide a proper tapping point for connecting the sound system to the new video transmission and recording system. The current tap is *ad hoc* and does not provide suitable quality. There are also several audio cables that are routed along wall baseboards that should be installed in wiring channels.

The Mixer panel and wired microphones for the Choir and Praise Band are all original equipment from 2004 and still in good shape.

## **Annex**

Children and youth programs were an emphasis in 2000. Since the parish hall was getting very crowded, the church acquired the Annex. The Annex is a small portable building located adjacent to the Parish Hall. It was originally located in the playground area behind the Parish Hall and was moved to its current location just east of the Parish Hall when construction of the main church building began in 2004. It is generally used for classroom and meeting space. The youth group regularly used it for meetings, as do several external groups such as the ESL Classes, homeowners associations, etc. The Annex was originally called the "YALL BUILDING" and some long-time parishioners will still use that term. Because of accessibility issues, all of the materials stored upstairs in the Parish Hall were moved to the Annex in 2020.

### **Structure**

Currently, the structure seems sound, however, a few years ago termite damage was found. The damage was so severe that the building had to be lifted and a new supporting beam inserted and part of the floor on the west side of the building replaced.

### **Mechanical**

The Annex is heated and cooled by two small window units. One unit rattles and doesn't work very well, but as long as the building is only used for storage one window unit is sufficient.

### **Electrical**

The lights and plugs all work in the Annex and are adequate for the building.

### **Other**

The Annex has a security system that is connected to the Parish Hall security system. So, before the Annex can be unlocked, the Parish Hall has to be opened and the security system turned off.

Appearance wise, the building is not attractive. The ramp and stairs to the building are warped and cracked and both the interior and exterior of the building need to be painted.

## **Grounds**

St. Johns is blessed (or cursed!) with a very large property. The grounds cover approximately five acres. The biggest challenge with the grounds is its sheer size. Keeping the grass mowed and trimmed is challenging and we have hundreds and hundreds of feet of sidewalks and curbs to trim. Currently, the maintenance of the grounds is done by a small volunteer group who generally meet on Wednesdays to work on the grounds. In 2018, Fr. Matt made an informal agreement with some local soccer players where they agreed to keep the grass mowed on the South third of the property to use as a playing field. The soccer players kept up their end of the bargain very well until the Covid-19 restrictions started. It is unknown at this time if they will continue this bargain.

In order to give the Building and Grounds crew a break during the hottest part of the summer, we have hired commercial landscapers to mow once or twice a year; but it is very expensive.

Specific areas of the grounds for concern are discussed below.

### **Labyrinth**

The original labyrinth was built in 2009 South of the Parish Hall parking lot. The original labyrinth was built as an Eagle Scout project, started by Chris Battle, and then completed by Jeffrey Harry with advice from David Petersen. The original labyrinth was slightly smaller than the current version and built from limestone rocks taken from the St. John's grounds. Sadly, the labyrinth fell into disrepair and, by the end of 2012, the Junior Warden was planning to remove it and return the site to its original condition. During the summer of 2013, the EYC raised enough money to purchase stone and decomposed granite and with help from several adult members of St. John's, completely rebuilt the labyrinth in its current location and made it a signature part of our landscape. The labyrinth has a sixty-foot diameter and is used by many in the neighborhood for physical and spiritual exercise. However, the labyrinth requires constant upkeep during the summer to keep from being overgrown with weeds.

### **Fence**

When the sanctuary was built, the City required the church to build a privacy fence along the entire length of the east side of the property. Premium quality cedar was specified for both the pickets and the posts. Unfortunately, because of very alkaline ground, the cedar posts began decaying very quickly and only a few years after the fence was installed, we had to begin repairing or rebuilding portions of the fence as the posts rotted at ground level and began to fall over. Volunteers over the next few years began replacing twenty-five to fifty feet of fence each year. Volunteers did the job since it is relatively easy and costs less than half what a contractor would charge. A special fund was set up to fund this effort and

there is still about \$628 in the fund. Because of the Covid-19 restrictions, no further fence work was done in 2020 and there are still hundreds of feet of fence to be replaced or repaired.

### **Berm**

The north side of the property is much higher than the south side. So, when the sanctuary and new parking lot were built is substantially increased the amount of impervious cover and the City required the church to build a berm along a portion of the south side of the property to prevent flooding the neighbors south of the church. The southern third of the property was also designated as a retention pond. As shown on the drawing below, the sides of the berm are steep and dangerous to mow with a riding mower. The south side of the berm is covered with rip-rap and has to be trimmed with string trimmers. Overall, it is a maintenance nightmare.



## **Parking Lots**

The parking lot in front of the parish hall is in a fairly rough, cracked condition and has had potholes near the entry. The Building & Grounds crew has patched the potholes and stopped them from expanding. The parking lot in front of the sanctuary is in better condition, but both parking lots are badly in need of new striping. In 2015, we got proposals from different paving companies. Although the striping was only between \$650 - \$985, both companies recommended that as a minimum the lots should be cleaned and a seal coat applied before striping. This would cost an additional \$3,000 - \$3,400. A complete upgrade of the parking lots, which would include digging up and reinstalling the worst parts would cost between \$11,000 - \$24,000

Lighting in the parking lots need improvement. There is only one light in the median in the parish hall parking lot and one light in the median of the sanctuary parking lot. The north side of the sanctuary parking lot is dark and with the worn striping makes it very difficult to see and park properly.

## **Community Garden**

Beginning in the summer of 2014 with an open field and no money, the Labyrinth Community Garden has grown from the seed of an idea to a functioning community garden. A water system has been installed, raised beds built, an orchard planted, and beehives installed. And, with money raised through SeedMoney, a pergola and tool shed were installed in 2020. The garden is self-sustaining through user fees and sponsorships, volunteer labor, fundraisers, and grants. It is located on a 100 ft.by 100 ft. section of the property adjacent to the labyrinth. The design of the garden echoes the design of the labyrinth.

Participation in the community garden is open to everyone and provides a shared space for our community members to get to know one another as individuals and build a sense of pride in the community. Having just completed a very successful fundraiser in November-December 2020, the garden members are ready to start building more raised beds as soon as the Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

## Summary

When the repairs to the North Wall of the Parish Hall are completed this year, the building and grounds will be in adequate shape, but will require a sustained amount of maintenance. Building and grounds issues the church must address soon include:

- How do we continue to maintain the building and grounds adequately with aging volunteers and a limited budget?
- How can we eliminate or rebuild the dilapidated fences?
- How do we best use the current buildings and grounds?
- Should we replace aging AC units now or wait until they fail?
- With limited resources, what areas need to be prioritized?
- How do we handle our storage? Currently, three portable buildings and every closet in the sanctuary and parish hall are full.

To answer these, and many other questions, I believe it is time for us to begin seriously thinking about what activities and programs the church wants to emphasize in the future and what kind of infrastructure is needed to best support these activities and programs.