



E-NEWS – November 8, 2015 – The Altar

To Members of Saint Mary Magdalene - until Christmas I will send this weekly news, adapted from my Sunday sermon, [remember it is a spoken sermon, not a literary composition]. It is my part to promote our need for additional funds to complete our church construction endeavors. Thank you for whatever you can do to help us.

Take a look at the end of my sermon where there is a glass design which attempts to portray simply our current challenge and efforts.

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Elijah the prophet is featured in the reading from 1 Kings today: Elijah met the widow gathering sticks, he asked her for a 'small cupful of water,' then he wanted 'a bit of bread,' finally he asked her 'to make me a little cake.'

Here are some other stories of Elijah you may remember from the Bible:

- he lived in 9th century BC,
- often stories about his contentions with Queen Jezebel,
- he walked 40 days in the desert to find God,
- when he heard God it was not in the thunder or the noise, but in the tiny whispering sound,
- Elijah was taken to heaven in a fiery chariot,
- when Jesus asked the crowd who people said he was, they responded 'some say Elijah or one of the prophets,'
- on the Mount of Jesus' Transfiguration Elijah appeared with Moses.

The Widow story today is from Chapter 17. I knew about another story of Elijah but did not realize it was in the very next Chapter 18: '*Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." When they drew near to him, he repaired the altar of the LORD which had been destroyed. He took twelve stones, for the number of tribes of the sons of Jacob . . . He built the stones into an altar to the name of the LORD.*'

Elijah made an altar of stone. For our new church construction we have a church Guideline about altars. It is printed on page 5 of our bulletin -- Here is that text:

The Altar

At the Eucharist, the liturgical assembly celebrates the ritual sacrificial meal that recalls and makes present Christ's life. The altar is the center of thanksgiving that the Eucharist accomplishes and the point around which the other rites are in some manner arrayed. Since the Church teaches that "the altar is Christ," its composition should reflect the nobility, beauty, strength, and simplicity of the One it represents. In new churches there is to be only one altar so that it "signifies to the assembly of the faithful one Christ and the one Eucharist of the Church."

Ordinarily, it should be fixed to the floor and with a table made of natural stone, since it represents Christ Jesus, the Living Stone (1 Peter 2:4). In the Church's history and tradition, the altar was often placed over the tombs of the saints or the relics of saints were deposited beneath the altar. The presence of relics of saints in the altar provides a witness to the Church's belief that the Eucharist celebrated on the altar is the source of the grace that won sanctity for the saints.

Built of Living Stones: Art, Architecture, and Worship Guidelines of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops

St. Mary Magdalene's Altar

Our church prefers that the altar in a new church construction be made of stone. What kind of stone? There is local granite from Mt Airy NC, in St Raphael Church in north Raleigh. All Mt Airy stone is speckled grey, black, white. It is local, but not so colorful.

Where can one look at stone most readily? In places that provide kitchen counter tops. The varieties are enormous. I was told most comes from China and India, some from Africa.

It occurred to me to seek some from Argentina in honor of Pope Francis. Argentina has stone, but it is not exported. However, much stone is exported from Brazil, so we could say our stone came from South America in honor of Pope Francis.

Some samples of colors I like are included in this Enews rendition of my sermon. Our baptism font will also have the same stone. No decisions about the stone though have yet been made.

I am not a geologist so I cannot describe various kinds of stone, particularly granite and marble, but I am fascinated by where it comes from: not just the country, but how stone has been formed over millions of years by the movement of glaciers, by pressure of the weight of the earth, by mountains pushed up from the earth such as the Himalayas, by the packed down soil of centuries, by the heat and fire of volcanos.

The myriads of color and texture of granite and marble are beautiful. We think of stone as not a living thing like plants and animals, but stone has changed and grown and hardened and developed over many, many centuries. Much of what is in the earth has become very beautiful. We might say 'it lives.'



A Final Word

My sermons for the last 9 weeks of this year will be about aspects of our new church. 3 parts of each sermon:

1. the new church part [today the altar],
2. the asking for financial support,
3. the lesson of the days' Scripture readings.

We do need additional financial support. You can find details about our current needs: in the weekly bulletin, in the mailing of a week ago, in the weekly ENews, on our website. Or: Ask me, if you have questions. I did not select to put the 2 widows in the Scripture readings for the 32nd Sunday of the Year. Our Church did that long ago.

A takeaway for today is: the widow in the Gospel put in the temple treasury collection '2 small coins worth a few cents,' as Jesus said: '*from her poverty, she has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood.*' She contributed to the Temple treasury; treasury is mentioned 3 times in the Gospel.

If I were that widow's pastor or spiritual advisor - I would tell her not to do that, not to give from her poverty, not to contribute all she had. She needs to take care of her own needs. But I am not her pastor; I am the pastor of this congregation. I do encourage members of our parish to help us in this new church construction project but not by asking members to give one's *whole livelihood*.

Did you notice the dynamic of today's encounter: after the observation of the widow, Jesus calls his Disciples together so they do not miss the lesson of this widow's generosity. It is as if He said to them: 'Hey you guys did you see what just happened?' Perhaps Jesus needs to take me aside and say: do not change the Gospel. Preach the Gospel as it is written.

Livelihood means different values in different times. I saw a number this week that increased my gratitude to those who came before us: 100 years ago families spent 50% of their income to purchase food. Today families spend 6% of their income on food.

November is the month of All Souls, honoring those who have died, those who have gone before us. I am grateful for my parents, grandparents, extended family, people who sacrificed more than I knew to provide food.

In altars for churches we are expected to put relics, one of a martyr. I suggest: Archbishop Oscar Romero, shot while offering Mass in the 1980's in El Salvador because of his preaching about current political and economic conditions in his country. He is not yet a Saint, but he will be, probably during the next year. The second Saint: Damian of Molokai, who ministered to lepers in Hawaii. The disease ultimately took his life.

The widow in Elijah and the widow in the Gospel gave their whole livelihood. Archbishop Romero and Damian gave more than their whole livelihood. They gave even their lives.

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St. Mary Magdalene Church

AS OF NOVEMBER 10, 2015

\$75,000

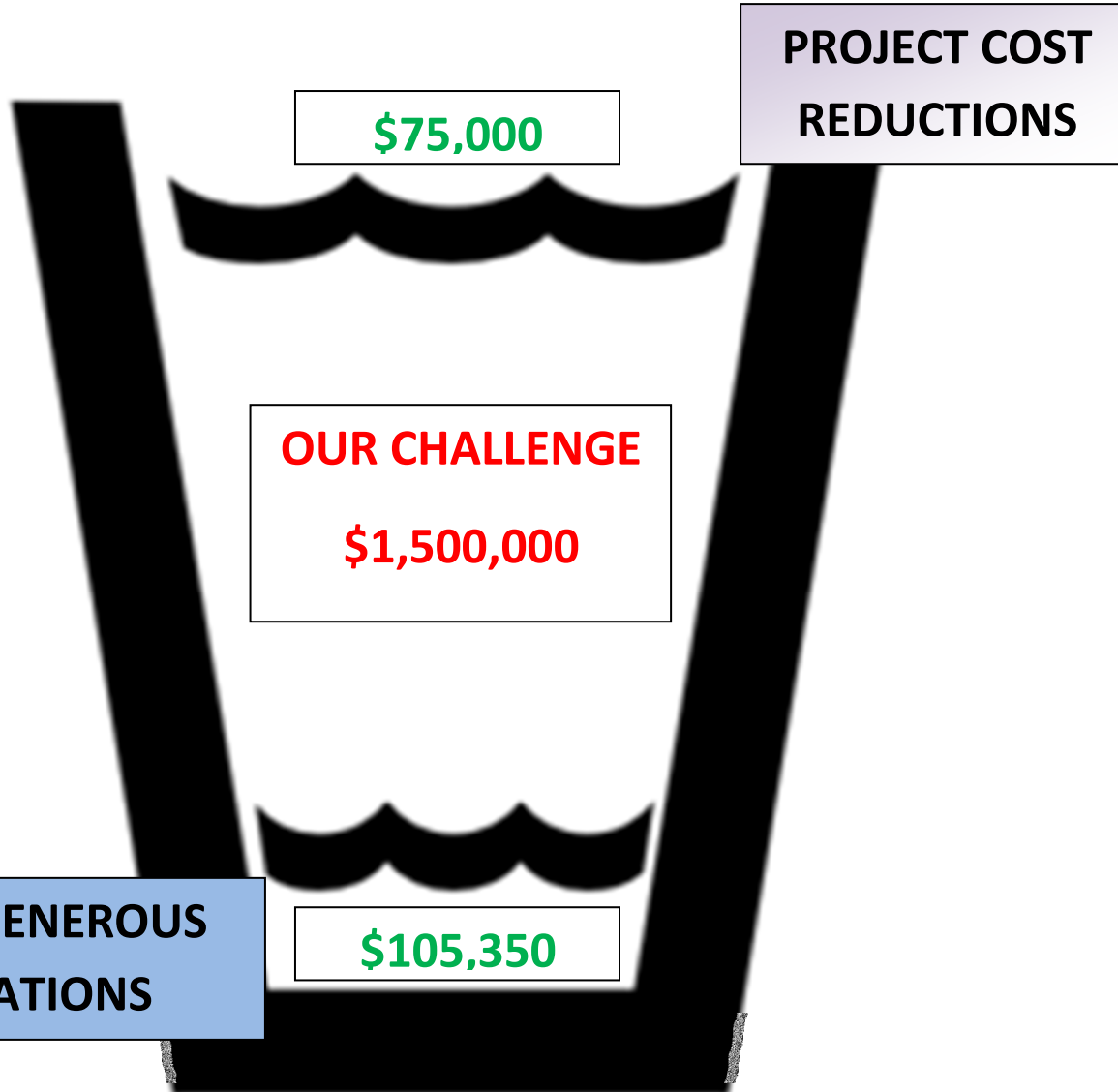
**PROJECT COST
REDUCTIONS**

OUR CHALLENGE

\$1,500,000

**YOUR GENEROUS
DONATIONS**

\$105,350



The Bottom Line

We ask each family in our parish to pledge \$5,000 over 3 years. If we had a 100% response we would be underway quickly. For those who have already made a pledge/gift, please consider an additional \$2,000 pledge/gift, more if you can, to help us with these new costs. You are the ones who have brought us this far, and you are the ones who will bring us to the finish line. Many thanks.