

Misson Church Winterization

The following is an excerpt from the presentation delivered at the weekend masses on November 18 and 19:

The recently-decided policy concerning our mission churches has been pondered by the members of our Parish and Finance Councils with varying intensity since last Winter. Each member of both of those Councils has taken the time to pray, to carefully consider, and to evaluate all aspects of the policy; spiritual, financial, physical, and emotional.

It has been customary to close and lock the Shrine during the Winter months since the nave and the sanctuary are unheated. Plaster restoration at the Shrine began five years ago. Those early repairs and all subsequent plaster restorations exhibit no ill effects from being unheated. A similar statement can be made about the St. Matthew's Rectory. Last year, it was winterized and was unheated, and the building exhibited no damage. There is no reason to expect a different result either at St. Agnes' or at St. Patrick's.

Last Winter, our parish spent just short of \$11,000 in heating oil for St. Agnes' and St. Patrick's Churches. Please remember that last Winter was quite mild, so that figure should be considered to be a minimum. The Old Corner Store in Jefferson uses the St. Agnes parking lot and plows it during the winter. The Town of Carroll plows the St. Patrick access road in order to have access to the fire hydrant at the far end of the parking lot. However, at both locations, our parish does not have contractors to clear any paths to the church entrances. Given the frequent freeze-thaw cycles that we experience here North of the Notches, unless those paths are consistently kept open, at considerable expense, ice buildups are inevitable and are extremely difficult to clear.

Judging from the telltale evidence of footprints in the snow last year, no more than three visits per month were made to St. Patrick's Church, the mid-Winter wedding there being excepted. Because the Tuttle's have traditionally cleared some pathways to the entrances to St. Agnes, there is no way to determine the frequency of visits to that church; however, a similar rate of visitations to that at St. Patrick's would be a reasonable estimate.

It's easy to appreciate that due to certain memories or events, one can come to cherish a particular church. Many of us are of an age when it is prudent to think about our final arrangements, especially the preference for where our own Funeral Liturgy will be conducted. Our Parish and Finance Council members have made every effort to decide whether or not a request for a Funeral Liturgy at a winterized and closed church could reasonably be accommodated. The unanimous conclusion was that it would be far too difficult and far too costly to grant such a request.

Perhaps this episode will better allow you to accept the unavailability of all liturgical services at our mission churches during the Winter months. Henry Tupaj passed away at the end of February. His funeral mass was at St. Rose of Lima, even though his undoubted preference would have been for it to be at the Shrine. That desire was satisfied by the celebration of a Memorial Mass for him at the Shrine on July 1st, when such a service was physically practical. The Council members pray and hope that all of you can come to accept a similar resolution to your own funeral desires.

Stated most simply, keeping the mission churches open and heated during the Winter months is not prudent, even to the extent of it being a squandering of our limited resources. The cost to our parish cannot be justified due to the evident very low frequency of use. Reasonable liturgical alternatives are available at All Saints' and St. Matthew's churches during the Winter months.

Here is the unanimously decided Parish and Finance Councils Mission Church Winter Policy with which Fr. Britto concurs:

The Shrine has already been winterized for three weeks. It will be locked on December 1st and the sign will be taken down until Spring.

Just this week, the St. Matthew's Rectory has been winterized; however, it will remain accessible for the storage needs of our church groups.

St. Patrick's and St. Agnes' churches will be winterized towards the end of this month.

The heat at St. Patrick's will be turned off on or about December 1st, the Blessed Sacrament will be removed, the church will be locked, and the sign will indicate that the church is closed until Spring.

The heat at St. Agnes will be turned off on or about December 1st. However, due to a sacristy candle commitment, the Blessed Sacrament will remain until January 1st. After that date, the Blessed Sacrament will be removed, the church will be locked, and the sign will indicate that the church is closed until Spring.

Weather permitting, the mission churches will be unlocked on or about April 1st, but they will remain winterized and unheated until the end of April, to coincide with the beginning of our parish's Summer liturgical schedule.

It is inevitable that some of you will have objections to this policy. Rest assured that your Council representatives and Fr. Britto have decisively concluded that this policy is in the best interest of our entire parish. We pray that you will accept it.