

We are making tremendous progress on our school kitchen. As most of you know, we decided to renovate our school kitchen so that it is up date with the Hennepin County Department of Health and the MN Department of Education. Additionally, we are rearranging the kitchen to prepare for the continued growth of our Early Learning Center (daycare and preschool), School, and Faith Formation program.

These past few weeks they have made significant progress. They've put in new plumbing, electrical, repaired the floor, and now are bringing in the new equipment. It's really beginning to look like a kitchen again!

I have learned quite a bit through this process. There have been a lot of parties who contributed to make it happen. Dan Duffy is our architect. He and his team drew up the floor plans (or blueprints) for the new kitchen. I learned how important those plans are because everyone works off them.

John Boyer and Boyer Construction helped with consulting. Mike Lindstrom and his team at Lindstrom Restoration worked from those plans. And our equipment supplier used those plans as they developed and brought in the new equipment. Without plans, the whole project would be chaos and we wouldn't have a new kitchen, but probably end up with new living room or a bathroom.

In our second reading, St. Paul lays out the blueprint or plan for love, and in particular, for married love. Speaking to the Ephesians, he encourages husbands and wives to look to Christ and His bride, the Church, as the model for love. In other words, Christ's love for the Church, and the Church's love for Christ is the "floor plan" for love. It is love at its best.

Let's look this love more closely. St. Paul says that *"Christ loved the Church and handed himself over for her to sanctify her, cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish."*

Jesus "hands himself over" for the Church. Love is not about what's in it for me, getting my way, or putting myself before you, but rather about making a gift of yourself for the other. In fact, this is the very definition of love: to will the good of the other. It is about handing over your "I," for the other. In short, love and sacrifice go hand in hand. St. Therese says that love is nourished by sacrifice.

St. Paul then speaks about the effects or fruits of sacrificial love. Notice how the Church benefits from Christ's love. She is sanctified, cleansed, and presented in splendor – no spots, wrinkles, or blemishes. In other words, the Church is purified and made beautiful. Obviously, while painful, we are undergoing this process now.

The Church, for her part, has a choice to make. She can either say “yes” to Christ’s love or “no.” By saying “yes,” the Church receives Christ’s love, feels cherished, and in gratitude, gives all of her love back to Jesus, her bridegroom. In short, St. Paul presents the love between Christ and the Church as the blueprint or model for love, and in particular, for married love. We call those who live this love in an exceptional way saints.

Very often, however, things don’t always go as planned. At the beginning of summer, the plans were all set for the kitchen. If any of you have been involved in construction, or had any part of your house remodeled, you know that very rarely does everything go smoothly!

In construction, there are delays, unexpected twists and turns – you open up a ceiling or wall and discover something new – and a new phrase I just learned, change orders, i.e., variations in the contract. Along with giving you headaches, they also change your budget!

St. Paul, for his part, gives us the God’s plan for love. This is love at its best, in its purest form: sacrificial, selfless, faithful, and life-giving. Unfortunately, however, as in construction, we experience problems. We are not angels. We are fallen. Every day, we feel the effects of brokenness in our families, the weakness of our wills, and the pain from our mistakes and sins and those of others. And at times, we are just plain selfish.

And even good marriages do not realize God's plan for love all the time. For example, what husband loves his wife perfectly as Jesus loves the Church: Always selfless, always asking, "How can I help today honey," always listening, and always cherishing her? If you have a husband like that, please introduce him to me. I could really use a deacon here at the parish.

Or what wife always acts selflessly, always honoring her husband, never criticizing him, and always encouraging?

In short, our lived experience often falls short of God's plan for love. That's the bad news. The good news is that the gap between the two is where virtues like mercy, patience, and forgiveness enter in. St. Therese, our patron saint, reminds us that charity is bearing patiently with the faults of others.

Additionally, the good news is that no matter where you are in life and where you are in your marriage, God is there. His mercy and grace are always available. Through the Church, the Lord is there to meet you in your messiness and pick up the broken pieces of your lives. And therefore, in the face of all the challenges we face with marriage and family life, we *always* have hope.

On the one hand, we hold up the beauty of God's plan for love, the model of Christ and the Church, and on the other, we meet people in their brokenness, listening, giving encouragement, helping carry burdens that all may experience God and the beauty of His love.