

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Our Lady of Grace ? New Church and Homilies

**By Stephen Somerville**

The Archdiocese of Toronto and the Parish Priest at Our Lady of Grace Catholic Church have been trying to determine whether or not a new Catholic church should be built in Aurora.

Aurora's population currently stands at just over 55,000 people and we are headed to over 75,000 in population by 2030.

I do recall that the Our Lady of Grace ?family? consists of about 5,500 families.

We currently have a 5 p.m. Mass on Saturday, and an 8.15 a.m., 10 a.m., 12 noon and 7 p.m. Mass on Sundays.

I attend the 8.15 a.m. Mass and unless it is either Easter or Christmas, the Mass is not overly crowded, but well attended.

This issue has been looked at a number of times over the past decade.

You may recall that a former Parish Priest had received an offer from Frank Stronach who was going to donate land and then backstop any potential facility cost overruns.

In the end, the deal fell apart for a number of reasons and this issue was not considered again for a few years.

Fast forward a few years. The Church engaged an outside firm to call a large number of parishioners and conduct detailed interviews regarding various aspects of a new church, including the funding for a new structure.

I was one of those interviewed and I said quite strongly at the time that I did not think we should be spending the huge amount of money on a new church and that I was hopeful that a permanent fix could be applied to the building's heating and air conditioning issues.

I liked the present location as it seemed central for people and there was a bus stop right in front of the parish.

I also told the interviewer that apart from a couple of times a year when the Church is really full and we have people sitting in the vestibule, that I thought we could still fit people comfortably or, if not, we should set up additional masses on the weekends.

I also made the point that I would rather have any money that we would use to build a new church instead be used to fund various church programs or help those in our society who needed it.

To me, the church edifice itself is where we come together for a shared communal sense of Christianity and also a time for personal reflection/introspection and it does not matter where we do this or how ornate the church surroundings are.

Our current Pastor, Francis McDevitt, recently started the new church process again and asked for comments.

This is from the Our Lady of Grace website:

?Thank you to all who made their thoughts known. The comments were universally respectful of the process and forthright. This bodes well as we move forward. On both sides of the question there were articulate concerns expressed.

?There were a total of 143 submissions made. Of these, 23 were in favour of building a new church and 105 preferred that we renovate what we have.

There were 10 submissions which did not in the end articulate one course or the other and 5 which were unsigned.

?If people are not peaceful with the process, to this point, or the result of the consultation it would be helpful if they contacted us so that we may talk about that now.

?We will accept the responses given in the consultation as sufficient indication that we will set aside the idea of building a new church for any time in the near future. There may be in the distant future a need to revisit the question, but we strongly hope not in our lifetimes.?

Based on my earlier comments, I am quite happy with this outcome.

The other item that I wanted to briefly comment on was the homilies delivered by our (or other) Priests, Deacons or by any invited guests to Our Lady of Grace.

In this writer's humble opinion, brevity and message are key in a good homily.

I believe that a homily should not be more than five to six minutes long and convey one or perhaps two central spiritual messages. Too many times over the years I have seen and heard 20 minute and longer homilies that contain far too many intricate messages and, in some cases, seem to be rather a stream-of-conscious discourse with no central theme.

As I listen to some of these long homilies and look around the church at my fellow parishioners, many people are either not paying attention or have tuned out, including, on a few occasions, yours truly.

I know that in previous days, or probably at other churches, the sermons were fairly long, but I think our priests and deacons need to take another look at their audience and understand that in this day and age of 500 television channels and social media, people's

attention spans are shorter and we need messages that are more succinct, but hopefully continue to be thoughtful and uplifting.

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