What is Happening in Our Church?
A Letter from Monsignor Manuel Simas

Today we celebrate the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus gave Himself to us completely in life and in death. He continues to do so every time we share in the miracle of the transformation of bread and wine into His Body and Blood during Mass. As Jesus is Eucharist for us, He calls us to be Eucharist for one another. We are commissioned to act as Jesus would, to be His voice, to open our arms and hearts to others as He did, and to appreciate the holiness and worth of all God’s creation.

I am so pleased that here at St. Joseph we are buzzing with activity. I see the face and the work of Jesus in all of you as we come together for our spiritual and social events, in parish ministries, and in our daily encounters with others. Our parish traditions and cultural diversity enrich us on so many remarkable levels. I’d like to especially thank the members of our Asian communities for sponsoring last month’s successful “Taste of Asia” parish-wide social event.

Last month I introduced the role of our new parish Director of Development, Don Kaefer. Don has been busy as can be with his new role at St. Joseph. Don and his team of volunteers are in the process of cleaning up our database and making sure current families are registered and accounted for. We are also verifying the status of parishioners who may have moved out of the parish. Many of you will receive letters asking for verification. Please help us by completing the brief questionnaire and returning it to the parish office promptly. If you are not formally registered, please visit our website or call the parish office to register.

As part of our Master Plan, we plan to sell the surplus St. Joseph cemetery property on Mission Boulevard at Chantecler Drive. I’m pleased to report that we have received approval from the Diocese to move forward with the next phase of the entitlement process, which includes obtaining city planning commission and city council approvals later this year for the future development of the property. These approvals will greatly increase the value of the property when it is sold.

This weekend marks the 25th anniversary of the reconstruction of the Old Mission Church. We were honored to have Bishop John Cummins preside at Mass on Saturday morning and lead us in our Eucharistic procession. The planning and participation that went into this event was exemplary. The Mission and Parish Staff and our ministry leaders deserve our thanks for making the celebration and reception truly memorable. The reconstructed Old Mission Church and adjoining museum are visible reminders of the foresight and generosity of those who built them to establish and nurture the Catholic faith in the East Bay. We continue to benefit from their contributions to this very day.

Finally, I ask you to examine your financial participation in our parish. Our parish will not run properly without your generous and consistent financial support. Giving increased in 2009, but we are falling behind in 2010. Although we are operating slightly under budget, the weekly plate collection is lower than last year and we have a small but growing deficit. I need your help to correct this. Your financial support of our parish is vital.

Remember, we are many parts. We are all one body. Let us make every effort to live as that body we are called to be in Christ.

Peace and love,

Father Manny
Monsignor Manuel Simas
Environment for Catholic Worship
Part 4 Assembly Seating and the Presider’s Chair, cont.

Assembly Seating and the Presider's Chair

The general plan of the building should be such that "in some way it conveys the image of the gathered assembly. It should also allow the participants to take the place most appropriate to them and assist all to carry out their function properly."

The church building fosters participation in the liturgy. Because liturgical actions by their nature are communal celebrations, they are celebrated with the presence and active participation of the Christian faithful whenever possible. (CIC 837 §2) Such participation, both internal and external, is the faithful’s “right and duty by reason of their baptism.” The building itself can promote or hinder the “full, conscious, and active participation” (SC) of the faithful. Parishes making decisions about the design of a church must consider how the various aspects and choices they make will affect the ability of all the members to participate fully in liturgical celebrations.

By its design and its furnishings, the church reflects this diversity of roles. The one who presides, those who proclaim God’s word, the ministers of music, those who assist at the altar, and members of the congregation all play an integral part in the public prayer of the Church. The design of the church should reflect the unity of the entire assembly and at the same time insure that each person is able to exercise his or her ministry in a space that fully accommodates the ritual action called for by that ministry.

The chair of the priest celebrant stands "as a symbol of his [office] of presiding over the assembly and of directing prayer." (GIRM 310) An appropriate placement of the chair allows the priest celebrant to be visible to all in the congregation. The chair reflects the dignity of the one who leads the community in the person of Christ, but is never intended to be remote or grandiose.

The priest celebrant’s chair is distinguished from the seating for other ministers by its design and placement. “The seat for the deacon should be placed near that of the celebrant.” (GIRM) In the cathedral, in addition to the bishop's chair or cathedra, which is permanent, an additional chair will be needed for use by the rector or priest celebrant.