

After decades of waiting, ground broken for church

By ART HUNTER

Editor

The parish community of St. Bernadette Catholic Church gathered Sunday, March 29 to break ground for a new, long-awaited church building.

A cold breeze and drizzle did not dampen the spirits of the hundreds of parishioners who sang and prayed, shovels in hand, as they stood around what will be the outside wall of the new church.

"The sun in shining down upon us, we just can't see it right at this moment," the Rev. Bill Stockelman said as the ceremony began.

The new church will be built on the same grounds as the current church building. The current church was built in 1944 and was intended to be a temporary facility.

Stockelman said that over the years, there have been numerous efforts to build a new church. There is a sketch of a new building dated 1960. There was a major fund-raising effort in 2002 that raised \$1.1 million in cash and pledges. But the parish never received permission from the archdiocese to proceed with construction.

Stockelman arrived at the parish in 2005 and continued with the efforts to build a new church.

The current church seats 144 people, which has been far from adequate for the parish's 700 households.

"We've had one of our Sunday services in a gymnasium for 10 years, so every Sunday we've been trying to pray to God under backboards, and from bleachers and that sort of thing," Stockelman said. "Finally, this church is a chance to meet the needs of the people."

Every Sunday for the past year and a half, the parish has been saying a campaign prayer which Stockelman wrote.

"I am quite convinced that this new church is a result of prayer, more than anything else, more than fund-raising techniques, more than consultants and all that sort of thing," Stockelman said.

Last November, Stockelman, along with 12 members of the parish, made a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France specifically to pray for their church. The group visited the site where the Virgin Mary appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858. Saint Bernadette is the namesake and patron saint of St. Bernadette Church.

"Two weeks later, we were given permission to build the



The Rev. Bill Stockelman blesses the site where the new St. Bernadette Church will be built.



Two-year-old Maria Tucker was one of the younger parishioners breaking ground on the new St. Bernadette Church.

church, after 61 years of waiting," Stockelman said. "It really feels like this is a gift from God that this is happening."

For parishioner Victoria Brulport, the day brought mixed emotions.

Her father had taken care of the maintenance of St. Bernadette Church for years and had looked forward to the new church, but he didn't live long enough to see it built.

"He wanted to be here to make sure it was built right, but he didn't quite make it," she said.

But Brulport said that she was glad to see ground broken for the new church.

"To me, it is an answer to our prayers," she said. "God is

bringing more of his people in to love him and to serve him."

The congregation of St. Bernadette has raised more than \$1.6 million and the building is expected to cost \$1.7 million.

The new 9,000 square foot church will hold 500 and will be expandable to hold an additional 200 seats in the future.

The goal for the completion of the building is seven to nine months.

The church is located 1479 Locust Lake Road, in Amelia and architects KBA, Inc. have been selected to handle the construction.

The church is on the Web at www.stbernadetteamelia.org. The church can be reached at (513) 753-5566.