



SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S CHURCH

March 2010

Dear Friends,

There have been several significant moments in our history when members of St. Bartholomew's have ventured to move, to build, to change or to enhance our church buildings and sacred spaces.

This is one of those moments.

After years of thinking, of vigorous and honest discussion, and now of planning and designing, we are ready to replace our aging and deteriorating seating with beautiful new chairs.

I ask you to decide prayerfully to donate one or more chairs to help equip our sacred space for the challenges of a new day.

We have designed a chair—a comfortable and handsome object, capable of connecting into orderly rows, easily moveable—to replace pews that are beyond prudent repair.

The enclosed brochure shows the chair and tells the story of the decision. A separate sheet deals with questions of detail.

Some chairs have already been pledged or donated, even before this formal asking. My wife and I are part of a daily increasing group who are ready—and happy—to donate chairs to honor and remember loved ones, or simply to give to God's glory in thanksgiving for St. Bartholomew's.

Please remember that the donation of a chair or chairs is a one-time capital gift, not a substitute for an annual pledge or gift for the church's operation and mission. If you're a pledger or annual giver and can't give a chair without reducing your pledge, please don't give a chair. That's how fundamentally important annual giving is.

Please take the time to read—and as the Prayer Book says to “learn, mark and inwardly digest”—the case we make here. I hope you'll then decide to give.

And even if you don't, please pray for this great parish and for all those who do give that we'll be worthy of this significant moment in our history.

Faithfully, your rector,

William McD. Tully

F.A.Q.

Frequently asked questions about St. Bart's chairs project

Where did we find the chair?

We designed it — with St. Bart's architecture and needs in mind. For several years we looked at cathedrals and other large churches with chairs. We consulted leading manufacturers and closely examined available stock chairs. Eventually, we settled on the chair in use in the nave of Washington National Cathedral as a model (originally designed for Lincoln Cathedral, England and first installed in Washington in 1976). Our consulting architect, Byron Bell, then worked with builders and significantly improved the design, comfort and manufacturing specifications. Along the way, he added a unique, space-saving way to incorporate a kneeling cushion between chairs to create an almost continuous surface in each row. This is a chair meant to be comfortable and secure and to last for a long time.

What's the problem with the existing pews? Can't we simply replace those awful cushions?

It goes deeper than the famously deteriorating, uncomfortable and duct-taped cushions. While the pew ends are solid oak and in generally good repair, the seats and backs are pine and are splintering. Years ago a solid plank was added under all pews to keep them from collapsing, a "temporary" fix that also prevents most of us from kneeling. New York cycles of heat, humidity, cold and steam heat have taken their toll. Some of the pews are from the earlier St. Bartholomew's building on Madison Avenue and are over 120 years old. Most of the nave pews are beyond reasonable repair for church use.

What will happen to the existing pews?

A wood recycler will remove the pews and store them. Shorter versions of the pews can be reconditioned, with new seats and backs, finely finished and purchased for home or other use. (Each giver of a chair will receive information about ordering and buying a pew.) Pews and wood not refashioned for seating will be sold on the robust market for aged and recycled lumber.

How can I dedicate or memorialize the chair I give?

When donors give a chair or chairs, they will be entitled to inscribe a plate to be attached to the flat surface on the cross piece of the chair back. (A simple template for your designation is on the pledge/donation form.) Be personal, of course. And be creative as well. Some sample dedications:

**In loving memory of John J. Smith
by Joe and Jane Smith**

**In thanksgiving for the ministry of St. Bartholomew's
The Jones Family**

**"Love God and your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:30
Jane W. Doe**

Given to the glory of God by John, Jane, Betty and Dick Smith

**In celebration of a great landmark for New York
The Miller Family**

What other work does my gift pay for?

The \$900 cost of each gift chair covers manufacture of this custom design—and even 900 chairs is a custom order—as well as removal of the pews, cleaning and repair of the tile and stone floors, refitting the small air return vents with floor grates. Your gift will also support the building of a platform and table style altar to be used in the central crossing from time to time, and all design and construction oversight fees. If a modest, budgeted contingency fund is not needed, that amount will go into the general capital fund for further restoration and preservation of the building.

What uses of the nave are anticipated once the chairs are installed?

Think big parish hall—a gathering space for a growing parish that yearns for chances to be together. Think performing arts. Think a civic common ground for meetings and forums of significance to New York's common life. Think even of an occasional banquet of our own or for appropriate non-profit organizations who would pay for the chance to do a gala fundraiser in such a magnificent setting. And, of course, think of the creative possibilities of liturgies in styles other than our most formal 11 am Sunday service. One thing we have learned is that a congregation that wants to grow needs to appeal to diverse needs and tastes.

When will the chairs be installed?

We hope the giving of the chairs (by outright gift or pledge) will be completed by July 30, 2010. The placing of the order and manufacturing will begin once one-third of the total has been given. The installation of the chairs is likely to happen in Fall 2010. The changeover will happen seamlessly over two or three Sundays and not disrupt our regular worship.

Is there a limit on how many chairs I can give?

Yes. Because we want to give present and former parishioners and friends an opportunity to participate, donors are limited to four chairs in the initial giving phase.

Should I reduce my annual stewardship pledge in order to give a chair or chairs?

No. The gift of a chair is a one time donation to our ongoing capital campaign to restore and preserve St. Bartholomew's landmark building. Your annual pledge to our operating budget is always the priority—a kind of sacred bond between members (and other intentional supporters) and the mission of the church. Put simply, if you can't give a chair while maintaining or growing your annual giving, please forget the chair, at least for now. See below for another idea.

Can I join with another giver or givers to donate a chair?

By all means. We already know of two friends who will combine to donate one chair. There is certainly room on the memorial plate for more than one name.

For giving /pledging questions, please call the Development Office, 212 378-0278.

*For technical questions, email Michael Collins, our Verger Emeritus, who is coordinating the chairs project:
mccollins3@hotmail.com.*