

Recycling parts of closed churches for new parish

By Michelle Martin
STAFF WRITER

Several dozen former parishioners from St. John of God and St. Peter Canisius parishes were on hand Sept. 29 as Cardinal George blessed the cornerstone of what is to be the new St. Raphael Church in Old Mill Creek.

The parishioners came to honor their former church homes, parts of which will be incorporated in the new St. Raphael, whose parishioners have been using a temporary worship site since the parish was formed in 2007.

The cornerstone itself came from St. John of God, a Renaissance-style church at 52nd and Throop streets on the South Side. The church was closed in 1992, and the building had fallen into disrepair. But its façade, including the whole narthex area, the bells and the towers, will be shipped to northern Lake County for St. Raphael.

The interior fittings, including marble furnishings, pews and stained glass, will come from St. Peter Canisius Church on North Avenue, which closed in 2007.

The idea actually came from an off-hand comment when Cardinal George came to officially open St. Raphael Parish in 2007. After working for months to create a viable worship site in an old machine shed, the pastor, Father John Jamnicky, remarked that it was time to start to thinking about a permanent church. Someone said St. John of God was avail-



Cardinal George and Father John Jamnicky (right) watch as Anthony Fernandez of JSL Masonry Restoration seals the cornerstone during the blessing and laying of the cornerstone for St. Raphael the Archangel Church on Sept. 29 in Old Mill Creek. The church is using pieces of closed churches in its construction. Right, Cardinal George signs a document that was to be sealed in a time capsule and placed in the church foundation.

Darrell Harmon/Catholic New World

able, and everyone laughed at the idea of moving such a huge church so far, said Richard Gambala, business manager.

But after surveying parishioners about what they wanted their new church to look like, he said, they wanted something like St. John of God. So Jamnicky and Gambala started looking at whether it would be possible.

"I know that Our Lady of Lourdes Church (on Ashland) was

moved across the street (in 1929)," Jamnicky said. "But to my knowledge, no one has ever done this."

"We thought, if we can't take the whole church, why can't we bring the things of value?" Gambala said.

That meant entering into a complicated process involving the archdiocese, the City of Chicago and its Landmarks Commission, Old Mill Creek, Lake County and

the Illinois Department of Transportation, Gambala said.

The organ — which was formerly in the Medinah Temple on the Near North Side — required its own set of permits and issues to resolve.

"Building a new church is a big project," he said. "This is incredibly complicated."

All told, the project is expected to cost \$10 million. That includes the purchase of 23 acres from the



Archdiocese of Chicago, construction of the new church, taking what it will use from St. John of God and demolishing the rest and landscaping both sites.

Jamnicky said he hopes to welcome parishioners to dedicate the new church for the first Sunday of Advent in 2011.

By the first week of October, workers had already removed the carved stonework, doors and other fixtures from St. John of God that will be used in the new church. Workers were planning to remove the bells and take the towers down. All the pieces were to be numbered and placed on pallets for their journey north.

Meanwhile, the foundations in Old Mill Creek had been laid, and plumbers and electricians were working at the site.

"It's moving along pretty well now," Jamnicky said.