

## REMOVING BARRIERS AND IMPROVED ACCESSIBILITY

Good morning / afternoon. My name is John Ongaro, and I am happy to be a member of **your** Holy Family Parish Capital Campaign Committee.

My wife Veronica and I moved to Whitby in November 1996 and have been a part of the Holy Family Parish Community for the past 26 years. Over those years, we have been very involved in various ministries, Parish social events, Faith Formation Initiatives, Bible Studies and joined the Parish Pilgrimage to Jordan and Israel in 2019. This involvement over the years has Blessed us with many friendships with other members of this very vibrant Parish Community.

We pretty much took life at Holy Family for granted and never thought too much about our ability to enter the building from any entrance and participate in the various ministries and events either on the main level of the building or downstairs.

We never thought too much about coming to Mass and connecting with various parishioners as we entered or exited the building usually through the parking lot doors.

However, what we have learned during the last couple of years is that life can change very quickly. I have realized that what we often take for granted can become a difficult or sometimes unachievable task. Please allow me to explain.

Over the course of the past couple of years, Veronica's ability to walk has become severely and progressively compromised. She now uses a mobility device to walk. Climbing stairs is an effort that we now choose to avoid if possible. Entrance to and from this building has changed dramatically to the point that she is now reliant on the elevator to get to and from Mass. The elevator is great to enter and exit the building, but it has virtually cut her off from the Community Spirit here at Holy Family. She does not have that meet & greet from other parishioners or those casual conversations before or after Mass because she simply enters here at the front, attends Mass then we exit using the elevator and out the east side of the building.

As an Usher for many years, I have witnessed many people, both parishioners and visitors struggle to get into this building. The stairs at all entrances are steep, narrow, and often very busy. Our ramp out front is steep. Veronica has told me it is difficult to navigate even with a mobility device.

I am now more aware of the irony. Those who have difficulty walking typically enter from the back of the church using the stairs or ramp, walk all the way down to the front pew where it is easier to receive Communion, then make the long walk back after Mass to exit the building.

I have also found it interesting that those parishioners or visitors who cannot navigate the stairs to get to the washrooms downstairs have to find someone with a key to open the accessibility washroom just outside the parish office.

So, you may be asking yourself, *why is he telling us all this stuff?*

One of the exciting features of our proposed new atrium is the opening of a new east entrance to the building. Based on feedback from parishioners, this new entrance will lower barriers and provide better accessibility to the building for those who struggle with steep and narrow stairs or need mobility devices to move around.

The staircase from the east side will have wider and flatter stairs with secure railings making them safer and more user friendly. The current elevator, though not changing, will be far more visible and accessible. Those who need to be at the front to receive Communion during Mass will have easy access to the front pews with far less walking than today. The new atrium will include washrooms on the main level of the building allowing easy accessibility to all members of the Parish Community. The Gather Café will be housed in the atrium making it accessible to all parishioners. Veronica will be able to choose to stay by simply exiting into the atrium, roll up to a table and enjoy a coffee and time with other parishioners then exit out the east side of the building.

The new east entrance will allow her to reconnect with the many parishioners she has come to know over these past 26 years.

My ask is this, as you contemplate your level of engagement and support of the Capital Campaign, please think of someone who may have challenges entering or moving around this building as it is today and let's ensure we **"Build Our Future"** and remove barriers for **all** members of this great community!

Thank you for your time and God Bless!