

Clarksville church plans big expansion

[Church, from Page 1B]

said Luca, whose parishioners will hold a meeting Monday night to discuss the expansion. "Our people are quite generous. They know we're trying to prepare for the growth we're seeing and for what we'll see in the next 15 years. Instead of having a knee-jerk reaction to it."

County officials expect western Howard's population to grow 60 percent in the next 10 years, while eastern Howard is predicted to grow by 22 percent. By 2020, planners say, western Howard's population will soar from about 30,000 to 70,000.

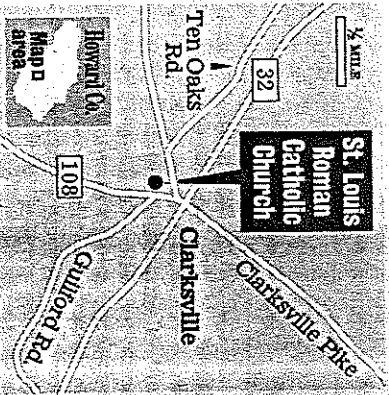
At St. Louis, the congregation has within the last two years exceeded the 650-seat capacity the church was designed to hold in 1980. During that two-year period, 700 families joined, bringing with them about 230 children, ages 3 and 4.

The parish school has about 450 children in kindergarten through eighth grade — twice as many as two years ago — and a waiting list of at least 50 students per grade for many of the lower grades. The number of students in religion classes has doubled from about 500 to more than 1,200.

That is reflective, church leaders say, of growing Catholic populations in suburban counties.

In Howard County, the number of Catholics has grown almost 150 percent in the last 20 years; in Carroll County, about 200 percent; in Frederick County, about 152 percent; and in Harford County, about 85 percent.

"We're seeing younger people moving out to Howard County in our parishes," said Bill Blaul, a



EMILY HOLMES; SUN STAFF

people," said parishioner Bill Farmer of Ashton. "When it's that tight, it's hard for people to get that much out of the Mass when you're pushing, trying to get in."

Some parishioners say the additional \$1 million for a new facility is well worth the money because they would gain almost 400 more seats. The old worship space also could be used as a large meeting area.

But Luca said the renovation option should also be considered. Many older parish members, he said, have emotional attachment to the old church and don't want to see it hastily replaced.

"People have gotten married there. They've had relatives buried here," he said. "There are a lot of memories, and we have to be careful not to trample on people's attachments to the church."

Some in the mostly commercial and retail businesses along Route 32 and Ten Oaks Road near the church say they believe they will prosper from the church's expansion.

"Their traffic patterns are on Sundays, and our business is during the week, so it wouldn't have any ill effect on me," said Stephen Kafi, owner of the Clarksville Auto Center on Ten Oaks Road. "The more congestion and the more traffic, the better it is for me."

George Miller, who owns the Ten Oaks Gallery, added: "I can't imagine anybody would be opposed to the parish expanding because it's the Catholic Church. That's a big one to oppose."

spokesman with the Baltimore archdiocese. "Howard County is the best example of the explosive growth we're experiencing in the Catholic Church."

At St. Louis, which stretches from Cooksville to Highland, the membership is being increased mostly by young working professionals with school-age children who are moving to Columbia's River Hill village.

"If you come to any of our services, you will hear babies crying and see kids running about," Luca said. "It says there's life. There's future and hope."

The parish council has been planning for the expansion for about a year. Earlier this year, a Baltimore consulting firm identified the church's greatest needs through a questionnaire and then designed sketch plans.

In February, the parish purchased a neighboring 1½-acre parcel to expand. Much of the land would be used for 300 more parking spaces. Leaders held two meetings this spring to inform parishioners of the proposals.

Building the new \$3 million facility, some church leaders say, would open up space for classrooms, meeting areas and provide a total of about 1,000 seats. Already, the school uses a mobile trailer for art classes, and some of the church's 50 groups meet elsewhere because the meeting space is full.

"Besides Christmas and Easter holidays, every Mass has hordes of

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