

United By Faith

Prayer for the Success of Our Process

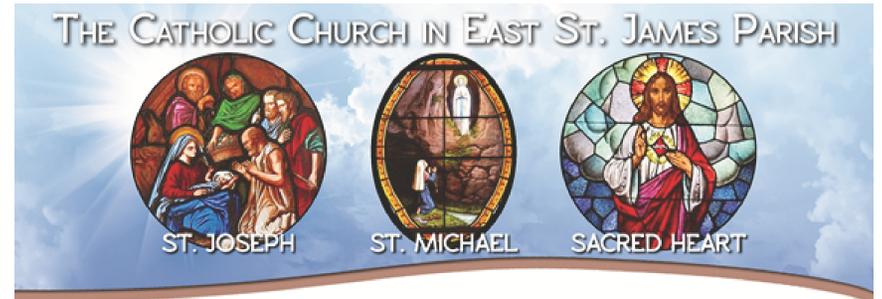
An excerpt from St. Michael Special School on "Gratitude"

. . . Blessed are you who stand beside us as we enter new and untried ventures, for our failures will be outweighed by the times when we surprise ourselves and you.

Blessed are you who ask for our help, for our greatest need is to be needed.

Blessed are you who help us with the graciousness of Christ, "Who did not bruise the reed and quench the flax, for often we need the help we cannot ask for . . ."

May God Bless you to be open, receptive, willing to listen and provide feedback for the needs of our parish family that we all may be successful in this endeavor. Amen



*Together With Christ,
For Our Future*

**Question & Answer
Booklet**

**Master Plan
for
St. Michael, Sacred Heart, and St. Joseph**

as presented through the
December 2013 Parishioner Survey
(no final decisions have been made to date)

Please pick up a copy of the survey to familiarize yourself with the various elements of the proposed projects.

St. Michael Parish (including St. Mary's Church)

- A. St. Michael Parish Hall
- B. St. Michael School building
- C. St. Michael Rectory and attached Kitchen building
- D. St. Michael Church – maintenance issues
- E. St. Mary's Church building – repair
or
- F. St. Mary's Church building – surrender

Most Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish

- A. Sacred Heart Debt pay-off
- B. Sacred Heart Church roof
- C. Sacred Heart – church choir loft issue
- D. Sacred Heart – other church building issues
- E. Sacred Heart Parish Center
- F. Sacred Heart older PSR building

St. Joseph Parish

- A. St. Joseph Church repairs
- B. Other repairs/enhancements (including Lucher chapel)
- C. Additional parking spaces

1. Why try to do a capital campaign now when the economy is so rough?

Most of the projects being considered for each parish are beyond the scope of regular maintenance. Yet the need to take action sooner than later to protect what we have and prevent further deterioration is clearly evident. The only way to do at least the essential projects is to enter into a capital campaign.

Most parishioners need to be money-conscious, of course. A campaign neither denies nor ignores this truth. If we move forward with a capital campaign, the focus will be on “*sacrificial giving.*” Sacrificial giving means making a decision to give substantially by reducing some other life-expenses, such as fast-food meals, or entertainment activities. Even with a rough economy we are asked to make the needs of our church parish a top priority in our life. For some this may be a new way of thinking about contributions.

In every generation faithful people express their commitment to God and their church through donating more than just a minimal amount. This is how our parents, grandparents, and those before them were able to build and provide the churches and other parish structures we have. Now it is our time to provide in the same way for our children, grandchildren, and future generations.

2. How can we do one campaign with three parishes?

With the *Institute of School & Parish Development (ISPD)* to guide us, we would be doing a single campaign, yet we do remain three (3) parishes. Each parishioner, regardless of parish affiliation, would be asked to make a financial commitment to the campaign. However, each parishioner will have the opportunity to determine how his/her pledged funds are directed.

Example One St. Joseph parishioner can decide that 100% of his pledge will be for St. Joseph. Another St. Joseph parishioner might decide to split his pledge three ways between the three parishes. Both are acceptable decisions.

Basically, designated funds will go to the designated parish. In the

case of those who choose *not* to specify where their pledge goes, those funds would be divided by the percentage of need for each parish.

3. Why can we not get more financial help from the Diocese?

Not surprisingly, most people do not have a clear picture of Catholic Church finances. Simply put, the Diocese has no financial resources other than what is collected from the individual church parishes. By many, this is considered a “tax,” but this is how the Diocese funds all of its functions, from central administration, to the training of future priests, to the multitude of charitable services provided.

Within the Diocese of Baton Rouge, parishes pay a “*Parish Share*” based on annual income, such as what comes from collections and donations. Parishes are placed in percentage levels from 10% to 20%, with the poorest parishes paying 10%, to the richest parishes paying 20%. How much an individual parish pays can fluctuate slightly from year to year as parish income rises or falls relative to their fellow parishes. For the 2013-14 fiscal year, Sacred Heart is in the 13% bracket, St. Michael is in the 14% bracket, and St. Joseph is in the 17% bracket; this is relative to the 68 parishes in the Diocese.

Worth explaining at this point is that the Diocese of Baton Rouge has placed a “cap,” (maximum amount), on capital campaign funds which can be taxed. The cap is based on the tax bracket of each parish. With Sacred Heart and St. Michael, the cap is \$40,000, per year. With St. Joseph, the cap is \$80,000, per year. This means that even though the first \$40,000 or \$80,000 can be taxed in a fiscal year, everything collected above that amount is tax free. Thus, there is a definite benefit to each parish to collect as much as possible in one year to reduce the potential tax paid.

Back to the question of help from the Diocese: While there is very little money merely to give or grant parishes, (the Bishop’s Annual Appeal does assist desperate causes), the Diocesan Central Finance can loan parishes funds, which is paid back at a reduced interest rate compared to public lending sources. In this sense, what

parishes deposit with the Diocese is available to other parishes as loans. (Parishes deposit with the Diocese all funds not needed for regular parish expenses, so each parish has an interest-bearing savings account with the Diocese.) Effectively, parishes are helping each other financially by depositing with and borrowing from the Diocese. This is how the Diocese can help parishes accomplish their building goals.

4. How can we hope to do all that needs to be done in each parish?

It is true that everything which has surfaced from parishioners during the input sessions might not be possible to accomplish all at once. Yet parishioner input is helping us to develop a “Master Plan” for each parish. The Master Plan can then be laid out in phases so that the more important items can happen first, and the lesser items will happen as soon as the funds become available. It should be noted that some projects will likely happen simultaneously within each parish, according to funds and the necessity of each project.

5. How will the priority of projects be decided?

The Pastoral Council with the Facilities Committee and Finance Council for each parish has the ultimate responsibility with the Pastor to determine what will happen in their respective parish. Fundamentally, we must address the safety and preservation projects first. Then we will look at projects which will provide facility enhancements to improve financial efficiency. Finally we can consider those projects which offer improvements to the appearance and decor of our parish buildings. No doubt, these generalized categories are not mutually exclusive. We will certainly improve appearances while seeking financial efficiency even with preservation projects.

6. When will the lower priorities, which can also be significant, be handled?

While we hope to raise as much funds as possible and needed to accomplish everything that is on our final list, this might not happen as quickly as we would prefer. So, the commitment is to do every-

thing we can do as soon as the funds become available. It is ultimately up to parishioners and their level of generosity to set the time-line for when the different projects will be accomplished. If you want to see something done, you will need to be a part of the process, from decision making, to contributing, to volunteering as needed.

7. How soon can we get started with these projects?

We are still in the feasibility study phase of the “*United by Faith*” process. Once it is determined that a capital campaign is viable for our parishes, we will move forward with the campaign itself. This is when parishioners will be asked to make a pledge to the Master Plan. As the funds come in, we will be working on design plans and lining up the contractors to do the necessary work. Once adequate funds are available, work will begin.

It should be noted that St. Michael and St. Joseph have funds on deposit with the Diocese because of the Restoration and Building Fund collections. Sacred Heart, of course, continues to collect toward the pay-off of the diocesan loan. Depending on how the Master Plan is “phased” for each parish, start dates for each project will be parish-specific and not dependent on the funds collected by sister parishes. In this way, work will begin as quickly as possible and move at the pace set by contributions.

It must also be noted that the Diocese of Baton Rouge has rules which oversee projects such as we are planning to undertake in each of our parishes.

First, we must have accurate architectural plans for what is to be done. Toward that end, we have already chosen an architect to assist the three parishes. **Mr. Robert Lundsford**, of St. Gabriel, who has more than 30 years of experience, and is extremely capable in church renovation work, will be designing and producing the necessary plans. These plans will need to be reviewed and approved by the Diocesan Building Review Board. Then the plans will be put out for contractor bidding, so we can get the best prices for the work which needs to be done.

Second, we must have the funds to undertake the various projects. Before any work can be done, at least 50% of the total cost of a given project, (not the Master Plan itself), must be on deposit with the Diocese. So, pledges alone will not be enough to start; we will need the funds in hand. Again, you can see how parishioner contributions will determine the time-line for the work.

Another rule from the Diocesan Central Finance Office has to do with borrowing money for these types of projects. A parish can only borrow from the Diocese as much as that parish earns in a single fiscal year. So, it might be possible to begin a project before all of the money is collected by borrowing some of the costs from the Diocese. If we borrow any funds, we are obliged to borrow only from the Diocese.

8. Why should we borrow money from the Diocese?

Most parishioners would prefer to do these projects without going into debt. That definitely is the best scenario. However, if we are confident that the pledged funds will continue to come in, and everything is ready to go – plans drawn and approved; contractors ready to get started; etc. – it may be wise to start sooner than later. This is especially true if the money borrowed is minimal, and the pledges yet to be collected would cover the costs of the loan.

St. Michael borrowed from the Diocese to do the necessary repair work on the roofs of the church and rectory. This loan was paid off in three years through parishioner contributions and the parish Festival.

Sacred Heart borrowed to get the work done for the new PSR building. Sadly there were unexpected circumstances that pushed the costs of the project above the pledged amount. The monthly Debt Reduction contributions have been paying the loan. The loan had to be increased a bit when Sacred Heart borrowed again to cover the “named storm” insurance deductible after Isaac to replace the rectory roof. While Sacred Heart has not been able to save contributions, having the loan has allowed the parish to continue its normal financial activities while slowly paying the debt.

So, it will be the decision of each Pastoral Council with the Finance Council and Pastor as to whether the parish will borrow to start sooner or not borrow and wait for all the funds to be collected. The decision will likely be based on answering the question: *“Can we afford to wait to collect all the funds?”*

9. Why do we need to make pledges instead of just doing fund-raising?

While fund-raising such as the St. Michael Festival or the St. Peter Chanel School Festival do very well at bringing in revenue for the parish and school, respectively, it cannot match the annual income generated by the committed generosity of parishioners taking part in a capital campaign. Fund-raisers take a great deal of time and effort by a small group of people who depend on the generosity of many others, but this can be a “hit or miss” event. (Remember the weather worries before the St. Michael Festival this past October?)

When parishioners make pledges, they are committing themselves not just to giving money but to the growth and development of their faith community. There is a personal moral and spiritual commitment to see the project succeed. There is a sense of bonding within the community because each person or family is doing his/her/their part, and together we accomplish what no one could do alone. While there is a core group of volunteers similar to fund-raising, the effort can be spread out more broadly with more people doing some part of the work so no one needs to feel overburdened. And, the more each of us volunteers some time and effort along with a financial pledge, the more ownership and community pride we will experience. All around, a capital campaign can become much more than simply raising money.

10. What happens to the St. Michael Festival and our special collections for the Restoration Fund, the Building Fund, and the Debt Reduction?

There will be no need to suspend the St. Michael Festival or the special collections. Because a capital campaign will focus on

sacrificial giving and a pledge commitment for a fixed period of time, it does not really conflict with these other forms of parishioner contributions.

The Festival succeeds very well in bringing the community together to celebrate and enjoy each other’s company. Sacred Heart and St. Joseph parishioners get involved with volunteering, too. With the Festival no longer needing to be the primary means for St. Michael Parish to raise funds, there may be less financial worry associated with the “success” of the Festival. We will still want to “make a profit,” yet the hit-or-miss weekend weather should not be so worrisome.

The monthly special collections for the parishes will certainly continue because we will always have regular maintenance issues. Please note that even when Sacred Heart retires the debt, like St. Joseph and St. Michael, the collection will begin to put funds toward ongoing maintenance projects. Parishioners have an established pattern of support for their parish through these collections, and there is no reason to disrupt this pattern. The funds will continue to be used appropriately.

11. Who decides where the money goes?

The Master Plan process will decide what projects will be done and in what sequence for each parish. This has been the purpose of the Input Sessions and the Parishioner Survey, so parishioners have a say in what will be happening in each parish. Your participation continues to be essential even now!

The costs of those projects will then need to be determined so that we can plan funding appropriately, neither cutting corners dangerously nor spending excessively. This will be reviewed closely by the Pastoral Council with the Finance Council and Facilities Committee of each parish.

The financial feasibility study conducted by ISPD will develop a picture of how much funds a capital campaign can reasonably generate. This will help the Pastoral Council in each parish with the Pastor to determine how to utilize the potential funds as optimally as

possible. This is ultimately who decides where the money goes. Yet you see how the decision is shaped all along by parishioner input and involvement.

Example (Warning: please do not focus on the dollar amount in this example which is most likely far from accurate!) Let us say that the feasibility study concludes that St. Michael Parish can raise \$400,000, in the campaign. Yet all the projects might cost \$700,000, (\$450,000 for the parish hall; \$150,000 for the school building; \$100,000 for the other projects). The St. Michael Council will need to determine how to direct the pledged funds, covering at least the essentials of each project, maybe, \$275,000 for the parish hall, \$75,000 for the school building, and \$50,000 toward the balance of the projects. Everything wanted or needed for St. Michael clearly would not be finished immediately. Yet we have made a strong start and will be able to proceed with the remainder of the different projects through the continued generosity of our parishioners.

12. What if we do not collect enough money?

If the capital campaign takes place, we will know fairly soon how much parishioners will be pledging toward the Master Plan and the individual projects. This will be the basis on which to determine how much of the Master Plan will take place sooner than later. The desire, of course, is to do as much as possible as soon as possible. If enough is not pledged or collected, we will obviously be limited by the available funds as to what can be done.

There is no intention to stretch the campaign past its conclusion date regardless of how much is actually collected. Obviously we will continue to request and receive funds until everything is accomplished; however, this will be post-campaign contributions just like we collect now through the Restoration Fund or the Building Fund envelopes.

There is no intention to do a second campaign immediately after the first. This would be an undue burden on parishioners who would have been giving sacrificially for a fixed length of time. *Please note, the timing of the campaign has not been determined yet either.*

It is possible that individuals who pledged a certain amount could be hit by financial difficulty and need to make adjustments to their pledge. No one will be “billed” for what they pledged. Yet we would hope that people will pledge reasonably so we can plan accordingly. And for those who must adjust their contributions, we would still hope that they would continue giving what they can until they complete their original pledge amount. In the end, how much the parishes receive will be up to the parishioners making the contributions.

13. What happens if there is an excess of money collected?

It would be wonderful to receive more money than needed to accomplish the projects which need to be done. However, if we should collect more than the expected costs of the projects, *that money would be saved for future needs*. There is no intention to take excess funds like some windfall and augment the projects by adding items or upscaling the original choices made. If the original plans were what the parish needed, then, that is all that will need to be done. We all know that the future will bring new needs, so it is better to bank the extra for those future unknowns.

14. Can we consolidate the cluster more to avoid repairs on so many buildings?

In a variety of ways, the existence of the cluster has allowed for the consolidation of parish activities, such as the daily Mass at the Prompt Succor Chapel in Lutchter, or the combined High School Religion Program for Sacred Heart and St. Joseph, as well as a single administrative location with the Pastoral Center at St. Joseph.

Yet, there remain benefits to having three parishes and parishioners doing some activities at each of the different parishes. It certainly helps us to understand that being a “Church” means we are not limited to one place for worship or spiritual enrichment. The very challenge of needing to go out of our way for different events, like Reconciliation Services or Parish Missions, leads us to reconsider how much we truly value the effort needed to develop our spiritual life.

Caring for our “home parish” can help ground us in a unique community identity and help us focus on the “origin of faith.” So we do benefit from the obligation to contribute to keeping up our individual parishes. To say “I come from this parish, and I belong to the larger cluster Church,” keeps us both planted and growing. Repairs will need to take place to maintain the facilities we have while trying not to over burden the individual communities with excessive work.

15. Why fix under-utilized buildings?

Some buildings are “under-utilized” in part because of fact that so much repair needs to be done. If all the buildings in need of repair were completely fixed, there is every chance that they would be occupied more often.

Specifically, St. Mary’s Mission in Union is under-utilized because of the smaller population in that community and the limited availability of priests to offer sacraments there on a regular basis. If the church building would be fully repaired, celebrating unique events such as wedding and funerals, would not be difficult. It is the regular maintenance and upkeep that remains problematic for St. Mary’s church building because this would take away from the limited resources at St. Michael. Likewise, to have Sunday or Holy Day Masses at St. Mary would mean *moving* a Mass scheduled at St. Michael to St. Mary; there simply are not enough priests to *add* Masses to an already overly full schedule. If the upkeep of St. Mary’s church was not an obligation for St. Michael Parish, (which already struggles to maintain its own set of buildings), this would be the ideal. This will require parishioners to “think outside the box.”

Another specific building presumed to be under-utilized is the St. Michael School building. Again, St. Michael’s population (\pm 410 families, including Union families) is much smaller than St. Joseph, (\pm 1700 families). Even Sacred Heart (\pm 725 families) is somewhat larger than St. Michael. Yet, St. Michael Parish is regularly utilized by everyone in the cluster. Like all of our church buildings, there is a beauty worth the visit, so spiritual events – retreats, missions, special presentations – happen here as frequently as in the other parishes. If the school building, its floors, doors, windows, bath-

rooms, etc., were in better repair, many more activities could likely occur there as well. As it is, the meeting room is used fairly often, and the classrooms are still used for the PSR program. Money to fix this building would be well spent, but certainly in proportion to the needs of the other buildings.

Some may wonder about how much the St. Michael rectory and its attached kitchen are utilized. It is true that when Fr. Frank Uter transferred out and Fr. Vincent Dufresne became Pastor, St. Michael rectory lost its regular occupant. However, Fr. Vincent does maintain a residence at St. Michael rectory and utilizes it from time to time; he did stay for a five month stretch while Sacred Heart’s rectory was being repaired following Hurricane Isaac. Currently, the Jesuits of Manresa are renting the rectory for one of their priests while Xavier Hall is being renovated. As well, visiting priests are housed at St. Michael as needed. So, beyond the desire to maintain the rectory for its historical value, there is still a need to maintain the house because it is regularly, if not continuously, utilized.

The attached kitchen building is not used as a kitchen for the rectory any longer. Honestly, it does see minimal use and mostly for storage. So any work done on this particular building will certainly be limited to safety and preservative maintenance.

16. If we lose priests, will any of our parishes be closed?

It is not unlikely that our cluster will eventually be down to two priests, and if more men do not respond to God’s call to the priesthood, we could eventually – we pray not – be down to one priest. The reduction in the number of priests will clearly mean a reduction in the number of Masses. It will probably also mean other sacraments may not be offered as conveniently as parishioners currently enjoy. Yet it is *parishioner need* more than merely the number of priests available that determines whether or not a parish remains open. Honestly, St. Michael should remain a viable parish for a long time to come because it is part of the cluster. Only with a drastic drop in population would it lose its status as a parish. We are many years away from this concern.

17. Will the Master Plan change if we change pastor before we are finished?

There is no ironclad guarantee that when a new pastor is assigned to the cluster that things, including the Master Plan, will stay the same. Fr. Vincent, himself, hopes to remain with us for at least another eight years, but no one knows this future. All the same, if enough of the Master Plan has been completed before the change of pastors, and the funds continue to be available for the ongoing phases, it is more likely that the full plans for each parish will be accomplished. Once more, parishioners truly have control over what takes place and how quickly depending on your willingness to commit and contribute.

18. Why are the cemeteries not included?

The cemeteries are not included in the Master Plan process because cemeteries are administered differently from the rest of the parish's property and buildings. While the church parish owns the cemetery, persons and/or families buy plots to provide for the burial of relatives (or themselves). Whatever is placed on a cemetery plot – tomb, vault, headstone, etc. – belongs to the family who owns the plot. It is not the church parish's possession nor its responsibility for upkeep. The deterioration of graves is due to the owners' failure to carry out maintenance.

There is a legal process the church parish would need to follow to take possession of abandoned grave sites. Also, it would most likely be cost-prohibitive to attempt repairs to such re-possessioned grave sites. The solution used by most church parishes would be to bury the full grave and all erected monuments back down to a grass plot that could no longer be utilized by anyone. A grass plot is easier for cemetery maintenance. We do need to keep our cemeteries safe and generally clean, but we can do very little about how people maintain their own grave sites.

Mausoleums are different as well. Persons and/or families who purchase mausoleum crypts also pay for perpetual care, which means the protection of the interred remains is handled by the church parish. Some of the purchase price is deposited in a trust

fund which generates revenue for necessary upkeep of the mausoleum structure. Currently, a mausoleum engineer with Acme Mausoleum Co. is preparing plans and specifications so that St. Joseph Parish can perform necessary repairs and maintenance on the main mausoleum. Trust fund revenue will cover these costs, so there is no need to raise extra money for mausoleum maintenance work.

19. How can anyone expect me to give more than what I am giving right now?

Your pastor with the full staff and administrative volunteers – Pastoral Councils, Finance Councils, and Facilities Committees – are truly grateful for the wonderful generosity of all our parishioners. We could never hope to do what we do in our parishes if it were not for the contributions of each and every person giving what s/he can. There is no doubt that people believe they are doing their best to support their parishes, so of course, we ask that everyone keep up this great effort.

Yet, all of us could take some time to reflect prayerfully on whether we are truly giving as much as we could, especially if we are not planning our contribution but just letting the collection moment determine what is placed in the basket. If everyone who gives regularly tries to increase by a small percentage what s/he places in the offertory, it would enable our parishes to provide better for the spiritual needs of our people. And for those who do not yet contribute or who do so sporadically, the opportunity to start a habit of planned contributions is here for you now.

Should we move into a capital campaign, it is true that everyone will be asked to give more than what you normally give. As has been mentioned above, the invitation is to sacrificial giving. Anyone taking part in the campaign will "feel" the effect of this commitment. This is how we invest our very self into our church parish. No commitment is requested at this time. However, it is time to pray for God's guidance beyond our customary way of thinking about our money and how we spend it. By God's grace we can each be ready to put more of our effort and commitment into our parishes for ourselves and for our future.