

REFLECTIONS

SPRING 2022

Recognizing our gifts of time, talent and treasure

Encountering Christ reaches \$100 million milestone

Thanks to nearly 23,000 generous gifts, the *Encountering Christ* campaign has marked another milestone — raising more than \$100 million to strengthen the church in Central Texas for future generations.

According to Bishop Joe Vásquez, the collective efforts of every person who contributed to the historic campaign since its launch in 2018 are responsible for this success.

“Each one of us has contributed to this legacy of generosity that will not only support essential ministries and projects, but also inspire many in the years to come,” Bishop Vásquez said. “Together, we are continuing to build a culture of encounter throughout our diocese.”

The majority of parishes completed their fundraising efforts at the end of 2019, when the campaign exceeded its \$85 million goal. But a handful of parishes that had delayed participation helped *Encountering Christ* pass the \$100 million mark.

These parishes had originally planned larger, independent campaigns inclusive of the diocesan effort but had either paused their timelines or changed course because of the coronavirus pandemic, explained Scott Whitaker, director of stewardship and development.

Continued on next page



“I love seeing what’s being accomplished throughout our diocese because so many people generously supported *Encountering Christ*, and knowing this is just the beginning.”

~Scott Whitaker,
Director of stewardship and development



Equally important to the now nearly 23,000 gifts that have been pledged to *Encountering Christ* is how many of these commitments are being fulfilled, Scott said. The diocese has collected \$61.7 million — 62% of the amount pledged to the campaign thus far.

Both the diocese and parishes only receive their share of funds as parishioners fulfill their pledges. These funds are placed in a special account for each parish. Every parish had a goal for the campaign and will retain 30% of the pledges fulfilled up to that goal. If a parish raised more than its goal, it will receive 70% of those overage funds.

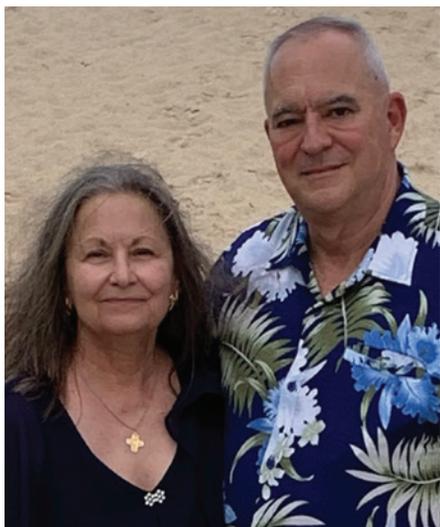
Scott reports that \$16.6 million has been returned to parishes, and every parish in the diocese has received a rebate. Many have started to move ahead on the projects they identified in their campaign case statements.

“I love seeing what’s being accomplished throughout our diocese because so many people generously supported *Encountering Christ*, and knowing this is just the beginning,” he said.

The diocese is also working to distribute its share of funds toward the campaign pillars in the diocesan case statement. In January, 16 Catholic schools in the diocese received 33 Advancing Our Mission Grants,

totaling \$41,767.53, from the \$1 million endowment created with *Encountering Christ* gifts. Grants ranged from \$382.50 to \$3,000 and will be used to fund projects that impact student learning.

Construction is also underway for three of the churches being built in Austin’s eastern ring: St. Joseph Parish in Manor and for Santa Barbara and San Francisco Javier parishes in Austin. The diocese reserved \$10 million from the campaign to build the four new churches — the fourth to be constructed at Sacred Heart Parish in Elgin — to meet the increased demand on physical and ministerial capacities that population growth has brought to the Interstate 35 corridor just east of Austin.



DONOR PROFILE

Donors support Clergy Formation

Lewis (Buddy) and Jeanette Wald reflect often upon Proverbs 3:9-10: “Honor the Lord with your wealth, with first fruits of all your produce. Then will your barns be filled with plenty; with new wine your vats will overflow.”

“God has provided for us and blessed us over the years, and He continues to do so today,” Buddy said. “We are all called to exercise stewardship by managing God’s resources in a way that glorifies God. It’s not our money, it’s God’s.”

The Walds have always supported their parish, St. Stephen in Salado, and the Diocese of Austin. But they recently decided to also ensure that they would continue making an impact on the lives of others and the Church long after they are gone by establishing endowments for the education and training of seminarians and permanent deacons through the Catholic Foundation - Diocese of Austin.

Since Buddy is in formation for the permanent diaconate and will be ordained in March 2022, they are personally aware of the costs associated with preparing men to serve as Church leaders.

The Walds believe that if the diocese is to be successful in continuing to bring Christ to Central Texas, it must have the funding to execute its mission statement. “We pray this legacy will benefit our future seminarians and deacons as well as the Church in the years to come,” Buddy said.

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Repentance: The act of rejecting temptation

By Mike Nelson, Catholic News Service

We began the season of Lent -- knowing that this, of all liturgical seasons, entails a certain amount of time, energy and commitment that takes us out of our comfort zones -- how many of us can say we are "filled with the Holy Spirit"?

Yet the Gospel for the First Sunday of Lent began with exactly those words (Lk 4:1).

Jesus -- having been baptized by his cousin John in the River Jordan, and with the words of God the Father, "You are my beloved Son" (Lk

tempted, if not inclined, to accept at least one of these offers?

Jesus, however, will have none of it. He resists each temptation, rebuking the devil at every turn with the word of God. The devil finally slinks away, in search of more gullible and less-resistant subjects -- i.e., all of humanity including, we would have to admit, us.

And that brings us to repentance, which in the context of Christian living can be defined as a change of heart, an inner conversion to a new



3:22), ringing in his ears and pounding in his heart -- embarks on 40 days of fasting and prayer in the desert, a zone in which few find comfort.

Upon completion of his fasting, he is quickly accosted by the devil who offers a series of promises -- food, power, everlasting life -- if Jesus will but worship the devil.

Who among us, exhausted and hungry, would not be sorely

way of life, a life in Christ that rejects worldly temptations, that sets selfish desires aside.

Rejecting temptation -- the act of putting God first in our lives, as Jesus did with the devil -- is one form of repentance that we are called to practice during Lent (and beyond).

That makes repentance more than simply acknowledging our sins and promising to do better as one



Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. ~Luke 4:1

might do in the confessional ("I'm sorry, it won't happen again").

Repentance is a commitment to being a true follower of Christ who invites us to accept and embrace this new life. For God's love is a constant presence, as Moses reminds the Israelites in the first reading on the First Sunday of Lent (Dt 26:4-10).

Moses recounts what God has done to free them from slavery in Egypt and to bring them to a land "flowing with milk and honey." He lets them know that God hears them and loves them despite their weaknesses.

Pointedly, Moses reminds them to give thanks for God's gifts, a gesture of humility that is essential in any act of repentance.

The responsorial psalm reiterates that hope and promise that God is with



Repentance, then, is an ongoing process, during and beyond Lent. But let us remember that while the devil is ever-lurking, God is ever-present.

us always in times of trouble. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in distress" (Ps 91:15).

St. Paul continues this theme in the second reading (Rom 10:8-13). "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead," says Paul, "you will be saved" (Rom 10:9).

And then, in the Gospel, Jesus wins the battle of wits and words with the devil by letting him know that God, and no one else, comes first. "You shall worship the Lord, your God," says Jesus, "and him alone shall you serve."

These, I would suggest, are encouraging Scriptures, messages of love, hope and promise that should fuel our desire for a closer relationship with Jesus.

Those of us who have been through Lent many times in our lives -- and, in challenging times like these, may be less than "filled with the Holy Spirit" -- might do well to take notice of those

in our midst who are unbaptized, the catechumens who, on the First Sunday of Lent, become the elect.

These are adults and children who are entering their final preparation for receiving the sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

This process -- including the scrutinies, Gospel-based rites for self-searching and repentance -- are designed to bring "purification and enlightenment" of hearts and minds, and a deeper knowledge of and relationship with Christ (Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, Nos. 141-149).

But attaining that relationship is one thing; maintaining it is quite another. Notice the final words of today's Gospel: "When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from Jesus for a time."

"For a time." That has a more ominous ring than much of what Scripture says today. It is certainly a sobering reminder that the devil, in the form of temptation, is ever-lurking in our midst.

And the past two pandemic-filled years have offered a stern test of our capacity to cope with our daily challenges to put others' needs ahead of our own desires, and of our lifelong quest for conversion of heart in search of life in Christ.

Repentance, then, is an ongoing process, during and beyond Lent. But let us remember that while the devil is ever-lurking, God is ever-present, providing the comfort zone of all comfort zones.

And that is plenty of reason to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

(Catholic journalist Mike Nelson writes from Southern California.)

REFLECTIONS

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Independent campaigns extend *Encountering Christ* into 2022

Parishes conducting independent campaigns alongside *Encountering Christ* have not only helped propel the campaign past the \$100 million milestone, but they have also extended the historic effort into a fifth year.

These parishes are seeking to raise extraordinary funds for significant projects — two to three times the parish offertory or more. The independent campaigns have *Encountering Christ* as a component, with parishes contributing the same percentage of their assigned goal for the shared ministries in the diocesan case statement.

One of these parishes is Christ the King Parish in Belton, which recently began the public phase of its Gather & Grow campaign to satisfy the parish's obligation to *Encountering Christ* as well as raise funds to build a Family Life Center. The new center will replace a circa 1974 parish hall and provide space to meet the current and future needs of the growing community.

"It's very run down and inadequate," said Krista Kaulfus, parish business administrator. "We do not have a facility that brings our family under one roof."

Gather & Grow has already raised \$2,320,054, and Christ the King intends to continue fundraising in hopes of completing the project debt-free, Krista said.

Other parishes that have either completed or planning independent campaigns include St. Elizabeth in Pflugerville, St. Catherine of Sienna in Austin, Sacred Heart in Elgin, St. Mary of the Assumption in Taylor and St. Paul Chong Hasang in Harker Heights.



Rooted in Christ, Growing in Faith exceeded its \$1.75 million goal, raising just over \$2 million, which allowed St. Mary of the Assumption to revitalize the interior and exterior of its historic church. Bishop Joe Vásquez celebrated a rededication Mass last October, which was "glorious," Father Keith Koehl, pastor, wrote in a letter shared on the parish website.

"This renovation is a source of joy and humble pride for us and generations to come," he said. "The blessings of God are beyond our imagination. Parishioners came together sharing their abilities, finances and prayers to make what we have a reality. May the beauty of the church inspire us to live with evermore conviction the call to discipleship."

The campaign will also allow the parish to make repairs and improvements to the rectory, parish meeting center, school, cemetery and St. Vincent de Paul building.

St. Paul Chong Hasang decided to combine its need of a new faith formation center with *Encountering*



Christ, and parishioners contributed 121% of Building a Legacy for Our Future's \$2.4 million goal. The parish has now completed construction on the 7,200-square-foot building, which will better accommodate the more than 300 children enrolled in the parish's faith formation program.

Remaining campaign funds will be used to bolster its facility maintenance fund and finish securing the campus with wrought iron fencing, as well as benefit *Encountering Christ*.



Diocese of Austin

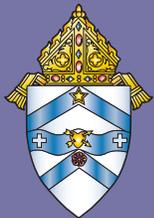
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