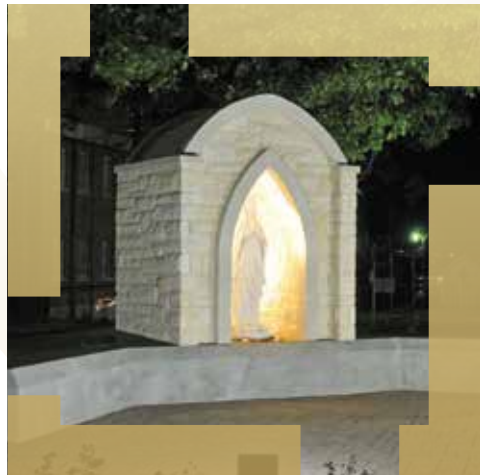


Saint Mary, Church of the Assumption

Waco



“So we, though many, are one body in Christ.”

~ Rom 12:5



CAMPAIGN PRAYER

Good and gracious God,
source of wisdom and generosity,
who, through your ever-present Holy Spirit,
has bestowed upon our diocese in every generation
the means to accomplish the mission of the church,
we humbly ask for the grace to lovingly respond
to your Spirit, leading us in the service of the Gospel
through this *Encountering Christ* campaign.

May we experience a deep and profound encounter with Christ
so that, transformed through faith, hope and love,
we are moved to respond to the needs of the marginalized,
raise up vibrant parishes, form fruitful ministries
and call forth pastoral leaders.

Asking the intercession of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
may the work of this campaign be pleasing to you,
as we await, in joyful hope, the fullness of your glory.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A Message from Bishop Joe S. Vásquez



Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

We have much to be thankful for in the Diocese of Austin. Our gracious Lord has blessed us abundantly and, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we have grown together, evolving into the giving and caring community of faith we are today.

Through our Pastoral Plan, *Encounter that Leads to Transformation*, we have experienced Jesus Christ in a more intentional way, and developed a roadmap for a vibrant and secure future for this diocese. In this spirit, I am excited to launch a capital and endowment campaign so we may continue to encounter Christ in our liturgies and ministries, and to provide support to our clergy and each other.

The *Encountering Christ* campaign will fulfill the mission of our diocese as outlined in the Pastoral Plan. The campaign goal of \$85 million will support our clergy at all stages of their vocation, strengthen our parishes, large and small, and expand our services to our brothers and sisters in need. The campaign will also ensure we form a band of “missionary disciples,” in the spirit of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (*The Joy of the Gospel*). We will direct funds to Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs, campus and young adult ministries, and leadership development for Hispanic and other emerging ethnic communities. Some of these funds will be used immediately to meet the needs of our faithful today, while other funds will be placed in endowments to be cultivated for the needs of tomorrow.

In the words of our Holy Father, “the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus.” I know this to be true in my own life and in the faith-filled communities I visit. In this spirit, I hope you will join with me in supporting *Encountering Christ*.

I am grateful for your prayers and support as chief shepherd of this great diocese. Please be assured of my prayers for you.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Joe S. Vásquez'.

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin

A Message from Father Joe Geleney



Dear Friends in Christ,

Saint Mary, Church of the Assumption is participating in *Encountering Christ*, a capital and endowment campaign to benefit important ministries in the Diocese of Austin and parishes, including ours. We join with faithful from 123 parishes and missions who are also pledging their commitment to ensure the Catholic Church in Central Texas remains strong and vibrant for generations to come.

Our parish exists, and has thrived since 1870, because of the generosity of many people. Our parishioners have always worked together to meet needs that arise, such as contributing more than \$23,000 in the most recent Catholic Services Appeal, which helps pay for the day-to-day expenses of our diocese. Truly, Saint Mary's is an inspiring community.

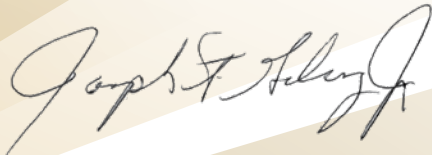
Encountering Christ allows us to band together once again — this time, investing in the long-term health and strength of our diocese and parishes. The diocese of Austin forms a community of faith of more than 500,000 Catholics across 25 counties, and we share in meeting the needs of our local church. The majority of these needs affect us all, but a few address challenges for the most impoverished among us. What an opportunity to live out our call to serve as disciples of Christ!

Saint Mary's will also benefit from *Encountering Christ*. Our goal is \$330,000, of which \$99,000 will remain at our parish to meet local needs, at our discretion. In addition, we will retain 70 percent of any amount we raise over our goal, which will significantly affect our parish. We have spent the past few weeks and months determining how best to use the funds we raise through our campaign, and have decided to bolster financing for our homeless lunch program, add to our Catholic education tuition assistance fund, and strengthen our parish by addressing several maintenance and facility needs.

Bob Kramolis and Reece Flood have graciously offered to serve as co-chairpersons for Saint Mary's *Encountering Christ* campaign. Please join me thanking them for their leadership, along with Bishop Joe S. Vásquez, who initiated this important effort for our diocese.

Please take a moment to review the effect *Encountering Christ* will have both in our parish and in our Diocese of Austin. This campaign has my full support and, as your pastor, I hope you will embrace this opportunity for our parish.

Yours in Christ,



Father Joe Geleney
Pastor

Encountering Christ

The Diocese of Austin is a thriving and growing community of more than 500,000 brothers and sisters in Christ. Our faith-filled presence has had a profound influence on Central Texas, and we continue to welcome more and more faithful to our parishes and missions each year.

Our diocese has seen many changes over the last 70 years. In the last dozen years alone, the number of Catholics in our area has grown by more than 25 percent. To address the challenges and opportunities these changes have created, the diocese spent a year praying about, reflecting upon and discussing a vision for our future. This year of discernment resulted in *Encounter that Leads to Transformation*, our Pastoral Plan inviting all members of our diocese to a deeper encounter with Jesus Christ, leading to renewal and transformation of ourselves, our homes, our ministries and our community.



Photo courtesy of Joshua Guenther

Strengthened by prayer, *Encountering Christ* allows us — in a spirit of stewardship and unity — to build a vibrant and secure future for the Diocese of Austin.

This campaign will raise a minimum of \$85 million to fulfill the vision of our Pastoral Plan and share in:

- Supporting Our Clergy
- Strengthening Parishes
- Emerging Disciples
- Embracing Discipleship



Supporting Our Clergy

Energized and well-formed priests are crucial to the ministry and operations of all parishes and offices in our diocese. We must care for our clergy throughout their ministerial careers and during their senior years.



Seminarians

Currently, 28 seminarians are discerning their vocation while preparing to serve as priests for the Diocese of Austin. The priesthood is essential to our Catholic faith, and additional vocations will be required in the coming years to meet the needs of our growing community. *Encountering Christ* will direct \$5 million toward the seminary endowment to encourage vocations, especially among the Spanish-speaking population; to offset the cost of education and formation; and to provide additional support for men who enter the seminary with student loan debt.

Retired priests

The men who are ultimately ordained to the priesthood for our diocese give their lives in service to our community. Even when their years of active ministry end, they never retire from their vocation to the priesthood but continue to serve us through prayer.

The diocese currently has 38 retired priests, with another 41 within 10 years of retirement age. A pension plan and trust provides a steady income that can be used for their housing and living

expenses during retirement. However, this plan is currently underfunded for the number of priests who will access it in the future. *Encountering Christ* will add \$5 million to the pension plan and trust to meet the anticipated shortfall.

Since most priests reside in the rectories of the parishes they shepherd, many lack housing once they retire from pastoral ministry. The St. John Paul II Residence for Priests is a comfortable home and

close-knit community where retired priests can share Mass, meals and activities; access transportation to and from appointments; and receive care and support for medical needs. In its present state, the residence will not have room for the number of priests who will retire in the coming years. The diocese will allocate \$2 million from the campaign to construct additional duplexes to accommodate another eight to twelve priests.



Strengthening Parishes

Our parishes and missions are the heart of our diocese. It is where Catholics celebrate the sacraments, learn about and grow in the faith, pass on and model their beliefs and come together to serve their community.

Expanding parishes

Recent population growth has stretched some parishes in this area beyond their physical and ministerial capacities. Knowing this is a reality we will continue to face for years to come, the diocese will reserve \$10 million from *Encountering Christ* to support the expansion of these parishes to accommodate new membership and ministries. A portion of campaign funds will also be set aside for the construction of new parishes in the future.



Rural parishes

Crucial to our Catholic community in Central Texas are our 80 parishes and missions in rural areas. Many have less than a thousand families, and may be the only parish for miles within their county. For these parishes, emergency costs can be too great to bear on their own. Although they have not experienced the same growth as urban and suburban areas, our rural parishes must remain open. Through *Encountering Christ*, the diocese will create a \$3 million endowment to provide additional operational and emergency support for rural parishes.



Local needs at all parishes, including Saint Mary, Church of the Assumption

Each parish in the diocese is rooted in the church but has its own identity and charism — and unique needs. *Encountering Christ* will have a significant impact on parishes, with \$22.5 million of the campaign's \$85 million goal remaining in parishes to address local needs. If we meet our campaign goal at Saint Mary, Church of the Assumption, we will receive \$99,000.

Saint Mary's has much to be thankful for. God has blessed us abundantly. We are called to reflect on the many blessings the Lord has given us and, recognizing that all of our material goods are gifts from the Lord, give back a portion of these gifts in thanksgiving for God's generosity and goodness to us.

Encountering Christ allows us to continue to advance Christ's mission by joining together to address the needs of the diocese as well as the variety of needs our growing parish must address. This campaign will help us build a secure future for Saint Mary's by enabling us to begin to complete the vision set forth by past generations and ensure the church's presence in the lives of our children and grandchildren. As we have been blessed, let us support the *Encountering Christ* campaign as Christians stewards. With God's grace we will continue to be an anchor of the Catholic faith in Waco.

Building a vibrant and secure future for our diocese

... and for our parish community

\$12 million to support our clergy

The men who dedicate their lives to serving us need our support at all stages of their journey. By supporting our clergy from seminary through retirement, we will encourage seminarians and priests to experience the fullness of their vocation, lifting them up as they help us consider and live out our own calling.



\$35.5 million to strengthen parishes

Our diocese benefits from the diversity of our 123 parishes and missions, which are urban and rural, small and large, multilingual, with schools and without. Given the critical role of parishes, ensuring their strength and sustainability is of the utmost importance.



\$20 million for emerging disciples

Our responsibility as Catholics is to ensure future generations of disciples are well-formed, prepared and excited to embrace and share their faith with our world. We continually seek to support the spiritual development of our children and young adults as well as engage them in educational and formational opportunities.



\$14 million to embrace discipleship

Fostering encounters with Jesus Christ leads to a deeper engagement that will transform our ministry, resulting in true missionary discipleship. Witnessing our faith is an essential part of Catholic-Christian discipleship.



\$20,000 for our Catholic education tuition assistance fund

Our school trust fund provides tuition assistance for students from Saint Mary's who attend local Catholic schools. This trust fund also supports our parish religious education program. *Encountering Christ* will help maintain this trust fund into the future.



\$10,000 for our homeless lunch program

Our homeless lunch program has fed upward of 1,100 mouths a month for 10 years, as well as provided toiletries, feminine products and warm winter clothes. This program is entirely funded with donations and run by volunteers — many of whom are younger members of our parish. Allocating campaign funds to our homeless lunch program will greatly expand our positive impact on the surrounding community.



\$69,000 for current maintenance and facility needs

The remainder of our parish rebate will be directed toward obtaining a new sprinkler for our green space, replacing the church sound system, fixing the broken rectory retaining wall, resealing the parking lot, and purchasing new hymnals to replace the current set that is more than 20 years old.



Emerging Disciples

Providing a full spectrum of formation opportunities, from childhood through young adulthood, will ensure we are preparing, cultivating and emerging the next generation of disciples and leaders for our church.



Catechist training and certification

Ensuring catechists and catechetical leaders are well-prepared to teach the faith is a key component of the commission to form all generations of Catholics into “missionary disciples” of Jesus Christ. *Encountering Christ* will set aside \$7 million to support parish catechist training and certification efforts.

Encountering Christ will also help parishes find new and creative approaches to faith formation — both individually and in collaboration with others — and acquire the resources needed to upgrade and enhance their religious education programs. Of the \$7 million, \$3.5 million will immediately benefit these initiatives and the remaining \$3.5 million will be set aside in an endowment to guarantee the long-term sustainability of these efforts and to meet future needs.



Faith formation

An estimated 80,000 children in the diocese are enrolled in parish religious education programs, and this number will continue to increase as the Catholic population does. We must create vigorous and engaging programs for youth that address current cultural conditions, the realities of family life and the needs of diverse parishes. Expanded adult formation opportunities are also needed.

In addition, we must work to provide parishes with essential resources, such as technology for remote learning, continuing education and certification for catechists, and financial support for parishes unable to employ religious education staff.

Catholic schools

Our 22 Catholic schools teach the faith to 5,500 children and youth in our diocese. Catholic schools provide students with a comprehensive, faith-based education, preparing their minds for college and their hearts for discipleship. Ensuring cost prevents no family from attending is a priority of *Encountering Christ*. We will reserve \$5 million to establish a scholarship endowment fund to help us welcome more children to our schools for years to come, and to spread the benefits of a Catholic education to more families.

A key component of educational success lies in equipping our Catholic schools with the tools needed to supplement and enhance their teaching. *Encountering Christ* will provide \$1 million to the *Advancing Our Mission Endowment*, which provides grants to teachers and schools to make upgrades and purchase technology or other materials.



Campus ministry

Formation and catechesis continue when youth enter young adulthood. Our diocese boasts one of the largest populations of Catholic college students in the country. Tens of thousands of college students across 14 colleges and universities in our area are served by campus ministry, missions and six university Catholic centers. These programs are vital to the life of our diocese, and we must continue to enhance them as well as our engagement with students.

We will reserve \$7 million from *Encountering Christ* for our current campus ministry programs, including supporting capital investments so campuses have spacious and visible facilities to welcome and minister to students.

Embracing Discipleship

The last 10 years have brought significant demographic shifts in where our population lives and in their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As disciples, we must be prepared to meet the needs of our brothers and sisters wherever they are, in the manner most appropriate for and resonant with them. We must also actively encourage and develop leadership in our parishes so they may thrive in the future and provide further opportunities to encounter Christ.



Tomorrow's leaders

All Catholics are called to lead their parishes in some way. We recognize, however, a need for Hispanics and members of other emerging ethnic communities to take a greater role in parish leadership. In particular, engaging the next generation of leaders now and bridging the gap between older and younger members of these communities is crucial.

Additionally, we need to identify and form the next generation of Catholic school leaders. Today's principals and teachers require ongoing education to stay energized and current in their skills and knowledge, as will future faculty leaders, in order to plan and implement specialized curricula, such

as for STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics) or special needs.

Encountering Christ will dedicate \$5 million to leadership development in our parishes and schools. Through immediate investments and the establishment of an endowment, totaling \$2.5 million each, we will replicate successful models of leadership identification, recruitment and formation for both the laity and clergy. To directly help parishes engage untapped leadership potential, funds will support parishes with programs in progress as well as encourage collaboration across offices.

Young adults

Our diocese is blessed to have grassroots groups of young adults who gather together in fellowship, outside of the parish setting, to grow in faith during their post-college years. Current resources of our parishes and Young Adult Ministry office prevent us from contributing in a meaningful way to these independent groups. Through *Encountering Christ*, we will reserve \$2 million to begin a network of young adult ministry programs and parish ministers, with the goal of testing and replicating successful young adult programs at the diocesan and parish levels.

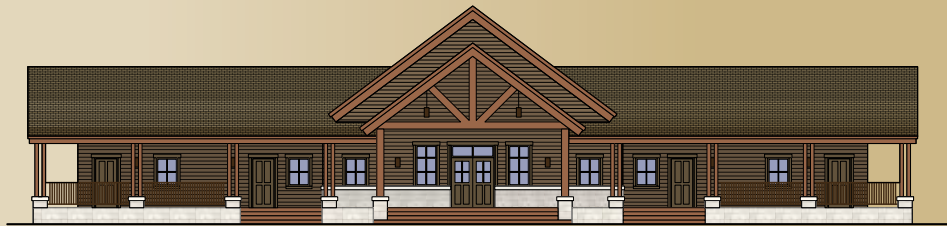


Catholic Charities

As the direct service arm of the Diocese of Austin, Catholic Charities of Central Texas serves those in need by strengthening families and promoting respect for human dignity and life.

The number of families Catholic Charities serves annually has more than tripled over the last 10 years, and is expected to rise to 100,000 annually by 2028. Although their work serves our entire diocese, they have a limited physical presence outside of the Austin and Bryan/College Station communities, making it difficult for some of our brothers and sisters to access vital services. Additionally, the Catholic Charities offices in Austin and Bryan/College Station are at capacity.

Establishing a physical office in Waco will have the greatest immediate effect and help provide additional services to historically underserved communities. The diocese will reserve \$5 million from *Encountering Christ* to renovate a diocesan building in Waco and to reconfigure the current facilities in Bryan/College Station to serve as extension offices in those areas. Funds will also be dedicated to reconfiguring the Austin offices so more staff, volunteers and clients can be welcomed.



Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center

The beautiful setting at Cedarbrake Catholic Retreat Center in Belton encourages retreatants to rest, be renewed in their faith and return to their parishes and the community refreshed, energized and prepared to engage in more prayerful and fruitful leadership. *Encountering Christ* will direct \$2 million toward upgrading the retreat center. To better accommodate larger retreat groups, campaign funds will be dedicated to expanding Our Lady of Good Counsel Chapel.

The diocese will also build a multipurpose meeting and dining space designed specifically with youth in mind, as well as two dormitory-style cabins with bunk beds for up to 48 retreatants. Because designated indoor or outdoor space for individual and private prayer is currently limited, we will use campaign funds to construct a small prayer chapel and plant a prayer garden.



Stewardship as a Way of Life



Our material possessions are far less important than an intimate relationship with the Lord. In the early 1990s, the U.S. Catholic bishops collectively prayed and reflected on the hallmarks of Christian discipleship. With many solid biblical foundations, the bishops concluded that a disciple of Jesus is truly a thankful, responsible and generous caretaker of God’s many blessings. In short, Jesus’ disciples practice authentic stewardship.

While the New Testament does not provide a total portrait of the Christian steward all in one place, elements of this image abound throughout its pages. Based on several parables, and many apostolic instructions, Jesus’ disciples understood they were to share their gifts with others. Guided by Scripture, we believe that the Christian steward is a person whose prayer leads to a constant awareness that God is the creator of all blessings in life spiritual and material.



Jesus presented the ultimate gift to God — the gift of his life — and we, too, are called to follow in Jesus’ footsteps by receiving God’s gifts gratefully, cultivating them responsibly, sharing them lovingly in justice with others and returning them with increase to the Lord.

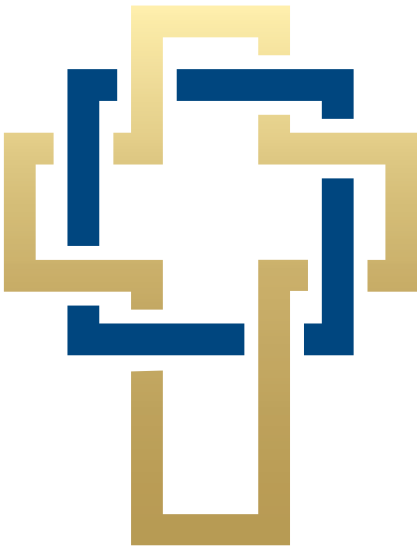
God has entrusted to Catholics the gifts of material creation, individual vocation and the church. Gratefully caring for these gifts leads to tangible examples of stewardship in our daily lives:

- **Stewardship of creation.** Respecting life, protecting the environment and developing our world through noble human labor.
- **Stewardship of vocation.** Faithfully carrying out our unique individual roles in God’s plan.
- **Stewardship of the church.** Prayerfully sharing gifts of our time, talent and treasure to fulfill the mission of the parish, diocesan and universal church.



Stewardship as a way of life has astonishing implications for our relationships and daily lives. We can experience life-shaping changes of mind and heart as we commit ourselves to the Lord. Recognizing God as the origin of life, we are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and one another.

The journey of discipleship is one of intense joy, fulfillment and peace. As Mary the mother of Jesus lived her ministry in a spirit of fidelity and service, we can find the same favor with God by living as authentic stewards of our world, our vocation and our church.



AN INVITATION

Let us reflect on the many blessings the Lord has given us. Recognizing that all of our material goods are gifts from the Lord, we are asked in the Gospel to give back a portion of these gifts in thanksgiving for God’s generosity and goodness to us.

Your gift is an opportunity to leave a legacy for the Catholic Church in Central Texas. Scripture tells us that Christian stewardship goes beyond giving of our surplus. It is a gift made from our substance.

It is in this spirit of Christian stewardship that we undertake this extraordinary campaign of *Encountering Christ*.



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OF THE ASSUMPTION

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