



## **St. Francis of Assisi Feasibility Study Executive Summary of the Findings & Recommendations**

### **Introduction & Methodology**

*Greater Mission, LLC* conducted a Feasibility Study for a proposed Combined capital campaign as part of the Witness to Hope Campaign in the Diocese of Lansing. A Gift Analysis/Constituent Study was conducted in conjunction with *DonorSearch*. A case statement, study questionnaire and interview list was produced with the assistance of parish clergy, staff and lay leaders. The study consisted of input from parishioners through individual interviews, six (6) Town Hall meetings and an In-Pew/On-Line survey. A total of 32 individual interviews with 48 parishioners were conducted. Parishioners were selected for the interviews to represent various constituencies of the parish. One hundred (100) parishioners attended six Town Hall meetings on May 2, 3, 4, 16 and on June 9 and 10. Three-hundred-ninety six (396) parishioners responded to the In-Pew and Online survey., with the majority responding via on-line using Survey Monkey. *The case tested was to raise \$10 million to construct a new 30,000 square foot Ministry Center to be built on property adjacent to the Church.*

### **Key Findings:**

#### **Appreciation of Parish and Challenges Facing the Parish:**

Parishioners most often mentioned the diversity of the parish: its parishioner base as well as the scope and diversity of its many ministries as one thing they most appreciated about St. Francis. The welcoming nature of the parish, its strong and supportive faith community and its size were additionally cited as strengths. There was very strong support for Father James, Father Shawn and people were very pleased with all the “good pastors” who came before them. The school, the music ministry and the the energy of the community were also cited. The most frequently cited challenges were: a large roster of parishioners but many are not active, the diversity of the population can sometimes lead to people “staying

with their own groups”, the expense of the physical plant and related maintenance issues, the need for more robust Teen and Young Adult programming, and that the Ann Arbor community is not generally “Catholic friendly.”

#### **Case for Support:**

80% of the parishioners who responded were in favor of the case and moving forward with the campaign. This is a combined total from all study sources. While support for the overall case is strong many parishioners commented on the size of the new building with the consistent question asked: do we really need a space that large? There were many questions about what the building would look like (internal finishes, external façade, landscaping, how would it be connected to the Church etc..). Many expressed that the new Ministry Center was long overdue.

#### **Can the Parish Raise \$10 Million or More?**

The combined responses of all of the participants indicated that 48% felt the parish could raise \$10 million. As is typical in most parish feasibility studies, an equal number of parishioners – in this case 46% were unsure if \$10 million could be raised.

#### **Would you support the campaign financially?**

Over 83% of those responded indicated that they would make a gift. Only 4% parishioners said they would not give and the remainder were unsure based on a variety of reasons, the most common being from people who were older and on fixed incomes.

#### **Level of Giving**

Four hundred and fifty-seven (457) parishioners indicated they would make a gift to the campaign in ranges as high as \$50,000 to below \$1,500. The total gifts that were indicated were over \$1,862,000 from 16% of the total parish community and 35% of the *regular contributors* to the parish. The average gift noted in the responses was \$4,075.

### **Would you be willing to volunteer to assist with a campaign?**

The combined responses of participating parishioners indicated that 19% (79) would volunteer to assist with a campaign. Parishioners were willing to open their homes for receptions and serve in other volunteer roles-especially as Prayer Champions. These figures indicate strong volunteer support.

### **Do you have any advice to give to parish leaders to assist with their decision making process?**

Parishioners had many comments and a *great deal* of advice to share. Over 100 comments were noted. They expressed consistent enthusiasm for Father James. They love the parish, feel that the ministry life of the parish is very good and are proud to be a part of the St. Francis community. Many indicated that Father and the volunteers he recruits for the the campaign must focus on outcomes: what do we want to accomplish as a parish by building a new Ministry Center? How will the Ministry Center enhance evangelization? Father must take the lead in making the case and that there must be a clear communication effort to explain all the details. In general, there was support for the wider diocesan case and parishioners expressed that St. Francis has always been seen as a "leader" in the Ann Arbor community. The school was consistently mentioned as part of the reason St. Francis has an excellent reputation; many feel it is a "key asset" and its long-standing tradition of excellence makes it a sought-after school for attracting families from around the region. Following are some quotes taken from the full study:

- Make sure it is clear how a multi-functional building will work
- Please show us how the school will benefit- will we be able to have performances there?
- The message must be very clear and consistent
- Go for it- this is long overdue!
- We need to have everyone participate- not just the regulars.
- Everyone must participate, not just the regulars.
- Transparency and teamwork will be the keys to success.
- Drawings of the new building will help
- This is a stretch but it can be done through prayer and hard work
- Would like to see data on growth and projected costs to maintain a new Center
- "Don't shoot too small".

### **Conclusions to the Findings**

The following is a synopsis of more detailed findings addressed in the full study report.

- St. Francis of Assisi is a warm and deeply spiritual community and people are very happy with its many ministry programs
- Father James and Father Shawn are widely respected and have the support of the parish.
- There was general concern about both the size of building (too large?) and the parish's ability to raise \$10 million.
- A number of parishioners would need to be willing to contribute a leadership pledge to the campaign in order for it to be successful.
- Communicating how the the school will benefit from the campaign will be essential to the effort.

### **Recommendations**

1. The findings of the Feasibility Study indicate that although there is strong support for the campaign, there are serious concerns about both the size of the building and the size of the goal. Counsel does *not* feel confident recommending a goal of \$10 million, as no size or seven figure gift prospects emerged through the study process.
2. Counsel recommends lowering the overall goal to \$8 million. This represents 3x annual offertory. We would still need significant major gifts, a very high level of participation (at least 40%) and a high average gift. If the \$8 million was achieved, it would provide \$6.3 million for the parish campaign.
3. We recommend an aggressive timeline of early engagement and solicitation visits be built to begin to reach out to the parish's top campaign prospects.
4. Counsel recommends that the needs of the school and perhaps a campaign allocation be considered by the Finance and Pastoral Councils, and the new Building Committee as the case is finalized.
5. We recommend that work begin immediately on new plan for a smaller, less costly Ministry Center.
6. Counsel recommends a comprehensive communications effort to inform parishioners of: a. the results of the study; that their concerns were heard and taken into consideration b. the process for decision making about key campaign strategies and c. the timeline for fundraising and eventual construction.