


Witness to  
**H****PE**  
*The Catholic Diocese of Lansing*

**St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church  
Ann Arbor, Michigan  
Feasibility Study Report**

June 14, 2017

## **Introduction**

*Greater Mission* is pleased to present to St. Francis of Assisi parish this feasibility study report. It has been a pleasure to work with Fr. James Conlon, Michael Scott and the volunteers on this project. The level of cooperation, hospitality and candor extended during the study process has been truly appreciated and has helped us to produce a thorough and comprehensive report. We are most grateful to have had the opportunity to serve this wonderful Catholic community.

## **Process**

*Greater Mission, LLC* conducted a Feasibility Study as part of the process for a Combined Campaign for the Witness to Hope Diocesan campaign. The study was designed to determine if a successful Combined campaign could be conducted to raise \$10 million or more to construct a new parish hall. Donna J. Marino , Senior Vice President of *Greater Mission* conducted the study during the months of May and June 2017. Anthony T. Gwiazdowski, Executive Vice President & Partner of Greater Mission, assisted her. There were several major components of the study process:

## **Case Development & Material Development**

A meeting was conducted with Fr. Conlon to discuss the Witness the Hope campaign, the parish project, parish history, and the ministry needs of the parish. A preliminary case statement was reviewed, edited and approved by Fr. Conlon. The case described the need for a new parish hall and reflected preliminary construction costs, including significant site work that would need to be done in order to comply with the city of Ann Arbor's strict water abatement and tree removal regulations. The total cost of the parish project is estimated at \$8.3 million, however the goal to be tested was \$10 million or just over 4x current offertory.

## **Giving Analysis & Constituent Research**

A comprehensive review of current parishioner giving was conducted. *Greater Mission* did this review in conjunction with *DonorSearch*. *DonorSearch* conducted an electronic review of public financial data, philanthropic giving and other information to produce preliminary gift rating information. *Greater Mission* then used this data along with parish giving data to create a suggested gift level for potential donors.

## **Individual Interviews**

Donna Marino conducted 32 interviews with a total of 48 parishioners of St. Francis of Assisi parish. The interviews provided an opportunity to present the case and receive input and answer questions. It also provided an opportunity to gauge how much those individuals may be willing to consider giving to a campaign, their willingness to serve as campaign volunteers and their specific financial support for the project. The interviewees were also afforded the opportunity to voice concerns, share advice and become more fully engaged in the project.

## **Town Hall Meetings**

The parish community was offered the opportunity to participate in 6 Town Hall meetings on May 2, 3, 4, 16 and June 9 and 10. Approximately 100 parishioners or roughly 4% of the registered families attended these meetings. The meetings provided parishioners the opportunity to learn more about the project, voice their opinion and concerns and to obtain answers regarding specific questions about the potential goal, their level of financial support, their willingness to volunteer for the campaign and other issues of importance and to complete a survey form. Fr. Conlon gave a brief overview about the campaign, Michael Scott provided specifics on the parish project and Donna Marino and Tony Gwiazdowski (on 2 occasions) gathered input from those in attendance by asking several open-ended questions to begin the discussion. Then specific questions were answered in writing by attendees using the Feasibility Study Survey Form. Of those who attended, 67 parishioners completed survey forms and those responses have been used as part of the data collection for this study.

## **In-Pew Survey**

A seven-question survey form was distributed at all Masses on the weekend of May 6 and 7. The case was provided to parishioners in the parish bulletin and also on the parish web site. The survey form continued to be available at all entrances of the church and in the parish office until June 10<sup>th</sup>. Father James spoke about the campaign in detail on the weekend of May 6 and 7. A total of 55 parishioners completed the in-pew surveys at Mass. This represents a total of less than 1% of the registered families. However, the majority of parishioners – 341 – filled out in-pew surveys on-line, for a total response of 396 or 14% of parishioners. The responses from the both the hard-copy survey survey cards and the on-line surveys were tabulated together and have been incorporated into the study results. Counsel notes that those who completed on-line surveys offered considerably more input on the proposed project and the case for support.

## Findings

The following are the findings of the study process:

Parishioners were asked a series of questions about the parish to gauge their level of involvement, feelings about the parish and concerns. Please note that in an effort to be concise we will combine answers to questions that appeared in each format of data collection.

### 1. What do you appreciate most about your parish?

This was the first question for those (couples and singles) who participated in the private, one-on-one interviews. The parishioners interviewed have been members of the parish from as few as 4 years to being at the parish for over 40 years. Parishioners gave a variety of answers to this question but the following are those cited most often:

Most Frequently Cited:
The diversity of the parish, its inclusiveness
The school, its tradition of excellence; it is sought after by young families
Strong and supportive faith community
The scope of the ministries offered-there is something for everybody here
The size
Fr. James' leadership and that of the many good pastors before him
The location
The music ministry
A feeling of being appreciated

### 2. What are the greatest challenges facing the parish?

The following are the most frequently cited answers compiled from the Individual Interviews:

Most Frequently Cited:
A lot of people are on the roster-but they do not attend
Diversity – it is “cliquish” here. Also the school and parish staff could be more diverse.
We need a program for Teens and Young Adults
We may have too many ministries- we try and be all things to all people
Size: our physical plant is expensive and maintenance has been an issue
School fundraising has been the focus
There is sense of bias in Ann Arbor to Catholics/liberal nature of the community

### 3. What is your initial reaction to the case that has been presented to you/are you in favor of the parish project? Are there other priorities that should be added?

There was a great deal of consistency in the answers given to this question in both the Individual Interviews, Town Hall Meetings and In-Pew/On-Line survey. There was overall support for the case but many were concerned about the lack of funds for the school. A typical comment: “We are going to build a huge, beautiful new building but the school could use a lot of sprucing up.” The Individual Interviews allowed for more discussion regarding the case, the following are the responses and some frequently cited comments:

<b>Most Frequently Cited: Interviews Only</b>
Position the campaign and the new building as a way to strengthen the faith and evangelization efforts.
The project is long overdue, its about time, -AMEN- pass the potatoes and lets get going.
The Hall is inevitable, but is it sustainable...is it too big?
I support the diocese and its evangelization programs.

### **Individual Interviews (Support the Case)**

<b>Response</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Response</b>
<b>Yes</b>	32	100%
<b>No</b>	0	0%
<b>Unsure</b>	0	0%

### **Town Hall (Support the Case)**

<b>Response</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	60	90%
<b>No</b>	1	1%
<b>Unsure</b>	6	9%

### **In-Pew/Online (Support the Case)**

<b>Response</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	305	90%
<b>No</b>	24	7%
<b>Unsure</b>	10	3%

During the individual interviews, 15% (5) participants indicated Case items that they felt were important for the success of the campaign and would garner additional support if added to the Case. These were: funds for the school, funds to enhance catechesis and funds for services to the needy

**4. Do you think the parish can raise \$10 million as outlined in the Case Statement?**

**Individual Interviews**

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
<b>Yes</b>	15	47%
<b>No</b>	0	0%
<b>Unsure</b>	17	53%

In general, parishioners interviewed felt that the goal was too high and that it would take a small number of the very wealthy coupled with a significant participation goal to “make it.”

**Town Hall Meetings**

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
<b>Yes</b>	51	76%
<b>No</b>	1	1%
<b>Unsure</b>	15	23%

The Town Hall meetings offered the opportunity for verbal reaction to the goal. The parishioners present at the first few Town Halls had a lot of questions about the plans for the new Hall: many asked for blueprints, renderings and drawings.

**In-Pew/On Line Surveys (396)**

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
<b>Yes</b>	171	43%
<b>No</b>	25	7%
<b>Unsure</b>	199	50%

In general, the analysis of the responses from the In-Pew/On-line surveys indicates that the parishioners feel the goal is very high and most are seeking much more detail about the building plans. Many even went as far to ask the question: If we do NOT make the goal...what happens? Can we build a smaller building? It is important to note here that the depth many parishioners went into using the on-line survey was very significant: their questions were thoughtful and their comments were detailed with the overriding concern centering on what was best for the parish *and* the school. The importance of involving more professional expertise in the construction process and also involving a wider audience in the planning were also consistent themes. Counsel notes that the quality and quantity of comments was impressive. Many people took considerable time and effort in writing their responses. In general, most thought that the \$10 million goal was too high.

**5. Would you support this campaign financially?**

**Individual Interviews**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	29	90%
No	0	0%
Unsure	3	10%

**Town Hall Meetings**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	61	93%
No	0	0%
Unsure	5	7%

**In-Pew/On-Line Surveys**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	322	82%
No	20	5%
Unsure	49	13%

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of parishioners who responded indicated that they would provide financial support for the campaign. These are very high positive figures.

**6. Upon reviewing the possible gift chart, at what level could you see yourself contributing?**

Gift Level	# Indicated	Cumulative #	Estimated Cumulative Gift Total
\$1,000,000	0	0	\$0
\$500,000	0	0	\$0
\$250,000	0	0	\$0
\$100,000	0	0	\$0
\$50,000	8	400,000	\$400,000
\$25,000	8	200,000	\$600,000
\$10,000	35	350,000	\$950,000
\$5,000	80	400,000	\$1,350,000
\$3,000	63	189,000	\$1,539,000
\$1,500	121	181,500	\$1,720,500
Less than \$1,500	142	142,000	\$1,862,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>457</b>	<b>1,862,500</b>	<b>\$1,862,500</b>

The cumulative totals noted in the table above are responses from all levels of contact. A total of 495 parishioners participated in the study (18% of registered families) and 92% of them (457) indicated a gift level. The 457 responses represent 16% of the total parish families and 35% of the regular contributors to the parish. The average gift noted in the responses is \$4,075. To achieve the full \$10 million goal it will be necessary for the parish to have *very* significant number of leadership gifts. It is important to note here that the highest gift level indicated was \$50,000. No six or seven figure prospects were interviewed, or emerged through the interviews.

**7. Who would you recommend to be among the lay leaders to assist Father in leading the campaign?**

Parishioners in each of the data collection segments provided insight into potential parish leaders. These responses have been provided to Father a separate memorandum. Counsel notes approximately 35 names were shared by respondents from all data collection methods.

**8. Would you volunteer to be involved in this effort as, (Leader), (Advocate), (Other)**

Volunteer	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	79	19%
No	182	45%
Unsure	141	36%

The highest level of volunteerism came from the Town Hall meetings where 46% indicated that they would provide some level of involvement. The lowest level came from the In-pew and On-Line surveys where little explanation of the roles was available. With that said, the response rate is positive and indicates that the campaign would likely be able to recruit a sufficient number of volunteers.

**9. Who do you think might be able to support the campaign at a significant level?**

Answers were provided through all data collections methods and the results have been provided to Father James under separate cover. 40 names were shared by respondents

**10. Do you have any further advice that you would like to provide Father and the parish leadership?**

Parishioners offered a *great deal* of advice in response to this question. Over 100 comments were offered. Most of the responses by parishioners were positive and supportive and only a few voiced negative opinions. Parishioners are very pleased with the clergy leadership of Father James. They love the parish, feel that the ministry life of the parish is very good and are very proud to be part of the parish. The biggest concerns noted were: the size of the project, the fact that the needs of the school were not factored in to the campaign and the



large “transient population” – there are many professionals and physicians who get transferred out of Ann Arbor after attending St. Francis for only a few years.

The following are the most frequently cited comments:
Make sure it is clear how a multi-functional building will work
In our current political climate...what about serving our immigrant population and the needy?
Supporting our school will only help the parish. Please show us how the school will benefit
The message must be very clear and consistent
We need to have everyone participate, not just the regulars
Father should tell us about his hoped for outcomes...how is the Hall going to support bringing people closer to Jesus
Love the idea of this campaign: we can host more conferences, missions, new evangelization, Alpha courses, bible study, etc...
Drawings of the new building will help
The campaign is a good idea
This will be a stretch but it can be done through prayer and hard work
I would like to see data on growth and projected costs to maintain a new Hall
If there could be an allocation for the school- especially to fix up the current PAC and the gym- you will get a lot more support
Prayerful approach is essential

### Conclusions to the Findings

There are so many positive things to mention about St. Francis of Assisi parish. I was particularly impressed by how enthusiastic the parishioners felt about their parish: its diversity, its many ministry program and the rich heritage and track record of its school and its graduates. Additionally, there was great support for the Witness to Hope campaign overall campaign, with few - if any - voicing any concerns about the Diocesan Share. And, in at least five distinct instances parishioners expressed that St. Francis “has enough blessings” and perhaps their campaign funds should be shared with other, poorer parishes in the Diocese! Fr. James is widely regarded by the parishioners as excellent pastor. Father Shawn also received many positive comments and many hoped he would be more involved in the campaign. Parishioners mentioned that they have been well-served by prior pastors and were grateful to Bishop Boyea and former Bishops for sending St. Francis of Assisi parish “great men.”

The number of people who mentioned they would volunteer to assist the campaign is good and some leaders interviewed expressed that they were ready to “get going.” More importantly, parishioners were very willing to share names of potential volunteer leaders and major donor prospects. They were also forthcoming with background on these individuals.

The findings of the study did not show that there was a significant lead gift for the campaign. Many people cited the same 5-6 families who *might* be capable of making a six or

seven figure gift and our donor research supports this. Whether they would give at that level remains to be seen. The study has received responses from approximately 18% of the registered families. While there may be some overlap from the three data collection methods and the actual percentage of response could be slightly lower, the total responses was low. However the in-depth nature of the responses via the On-Line Survey were encouraging. The study has identified only \$ 1,862,500 in potential gifts. The average gift identified in the study is \$4, 075.

While there is good support for the overall parish and the diocesan case- as previously noted there were virtually no comments or objections regarding the Diocesan share - parishioners voiced their strongest concerns about the following: the size of the building, the size of the goal and the lack of campaign funding for the school. These concerns were articulated in a thoughtful and collegial way and with the overall success of the Witness to Hope campaign in mind. Counsel notes there were a few parishioners who voiced concerns about the parish's lack of funding for the needs of the poor, both in Ann Arbor and beyond. They expressed support for the Diocesan allocation to Catholic Charities.

Based on these conclusions to the findings and our experience, *Greater Mission* makes the following recommendations:

### **Recommendations**

1. The findings of the Feasibility Study indicate that although there is support for the campaign, there are serious concern about both the size of the building and the size of the goal. We do not feel confident recommending a Combined Campaign goal of \$10 million as no six or seven figure prospects were involved in the Study.
2. We feel confident recommending lowering the overall goal to \$8 million. This represents 3x offertory. We would still need significant gifts, a high level of participation and a high average gift. If the \$8 million goal was achieved it would provide \$6.3 for the parish campaign.
3. Our further recommendation would be to build an aggressive timeline of engagement and solicitation visits beginning in late July to reach out and solicit potential gifts with at least the top 25 identified leadership prospects.
4. Our further recommendation would be to allocate a percentage of the funds raised,- the percentage to be determined by the parish's Finance, Pastoral and new Building Committees - for renovations and upgrades to the school. The gymnasium and the PAC were consistently mentioned by parishioners as priorities.

5. We recommend that work begin as soon as possible to come up a lower-cost alternative for a new Hall. We recommend that this process be as inclusive as possible with the three parish lay leadership councils and presented to the parish.
6. We recommend that as soon as possible the parish inform parishioners of the results of the Feasibility Study and that their concerns were heard and their input has been taken into consideration.
7. Greater Mission recommends that the parish work closely with counsel to begin an education and communication process that will provide parishioners with information about decision making for the final parish project and the importance of the Witness to Hope campaign timeline, as well as key events that will begin in earnest in August.

### **Final Thoughts**

St. Francis has a well-informed, educated constituency, who love their parish, their school and their clergy. They want to do what is best for the future of the parish in a prudent, “do-able” way as St. Francis of Assisi continues to meet the spiritual and educational needs of families in Ann Arbor and the surrounding communities. St. Francis has *many* factors for campaign success working in their favor. The key to a campaign of this magnitude will be an extraordinary effort that combines of six and seven leadership gifts, an unprecedented level of participation and a Case that offers a wide appeal to school families, alumni, and the many parishioners involved in current and future ministry programs. Greater Mission looks forward to the weeks and months ahead in assisting the parish in its ambitious and much-needed campus improvements.