

St. Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish Brenham



ENCOUNTERING CHRIST



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

~ Rom 12:5

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*.

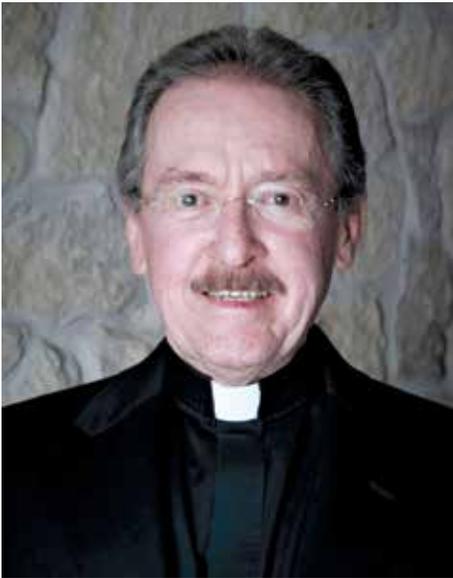
I am grateful for your prayers and support as chief shepherd of this great diocese. Please be assured of my prayers for you.

Sincerely in Christ,

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

Most Reverend Joe S. Vásquez
Bishop of Austin

A Message from Reverend Ernesto Elizondo



Dear Parishioners,

St. Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish 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 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 and sacrifice of many. Our parishioners have always worked together to meet needs that arise, such as during our parish campaign to replace the aging air conditioning in the temple and repair the roofs on both the temple, the parish activity center and the old school building. Truly, St. Mary, Immaculate Conception is an inspiring community.

St. Mary will also benefit from *Encountering Christ*. Our goal is \$955,000 of which \$286,500 will remain at our parish to meet our local needs. In addition, we will retain 70 percent of any amount we raise over our goal. Although we have completed many repairs to our campus, we still have much to do. We need to increase our security in the temple without reducing access to our beautiful worship space. Our rusting playground is becoming unsafe for our children, and the parish activity center kitchen equipment is outdated. More parking is needed. We also must increase our Perpetual Endowment Fund, subsidize ministries and reduce debt.

Please take a moment to reflect on the effect *Encountering Christ* will have both in our parish and in the 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E. Elizondo', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Ernesto Elizondo
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



Strengthening Parishes, including St. Mary, Immaculate Conception

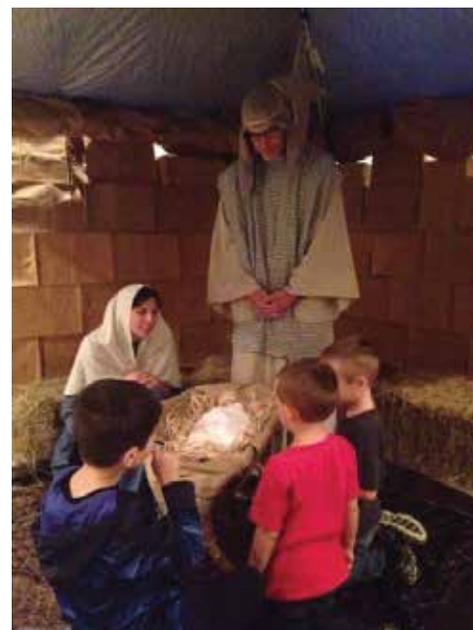
Our parishes and missions are the heart of our diocese. It is where Catholics celebrate the sacraments, learn about and grow in the faith, pass on and model their beliefs and come together to serve their community.



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 St. Mary, Immaculate Conception Parish, we will receive \$286,500.

While much has changed at St. Mary over the years, the generosity of our community has remained constant. In 2014, we began making much-needed upgrades to our parish, completing important capital projects, from roofing and air conditioning to new sound systems. The windows in the school building have also been replaced and the asphalt parking areas sealed and striped. In addition, our youth ministry program is growing, we are evangelizing residents within our parish boundaries, and our many ministries serve those in need.

To ensure St. Mary's needs are met for years to come, we have been thoughtful about how we will use the funds our parish receives from *Encountering Christ*. We plan to invest in an endowment and reduce debt, giving our parish financial security for years to come, as well as improve the property behind the temple, upgrade the playground and parish activity center kitchen, and add safety features to the temple.



Building a vibrant and secure future for our diocese

\$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.



... and for our parish community



\$50,000 for temple safety and security

We have researched locks to increase the safety of parishioners without compromising the temple's beauty and Romanesque architecture. Installing these locks and replacing the tile steps at the entrance will benefit all in our community.



\$70,000 for grounds improvements

The house and area behind our temple are an eyesore. Taking ownership of this property will allow us to clean up the area and increase parking — reducing the need for street parking.



\$60,000 for playground and kitchen equipment

Our playground equipment is rusting and in need of replacement. Designing new equipment will ensure the playground entertains a wide age range of children, and new fencing and mulch will make the area safe and attractive. Campaign funds will also be used for new equipment in the parish activity center kitchen, which will benefit meals prepared for ministries and parish functions.



\$106,500 toward an endowment, ministries and debt repayment

Investing campaign funds in an endowment will ensure a future source of income for the needs and maintenance of our parish and cemetery. Campaign funds will also support ministries and reduce parish debt.

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.

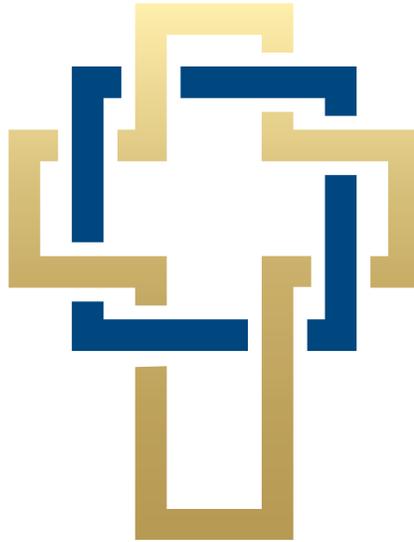
God has entrusted to Catholics the gifts of material creation, individual vocation and the church. Gratefully caring for these gifts leads to tangible examples of stewardship in our daily lives:

- **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*.



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, for the fullness of your glory.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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