

July 2019

Dear Friends,

The priesthood is an essential aspect of our Catholic faith, since without priests, there is no Eucharist. I am thankful that *Encountering Christ* is helping ensure we have happy, healthy and holy men entering the priesthood.

The \$5 million the campaign will add to the seminarian endowment is vital to supporting the men discerning God’s call while they undertake years of formation to serve the Lord and us, his flock. Like many dioceses without a seminary, the Diocese of Austin sends its seminarians elsewhere to study. These seminaries and programs of seminary formation are excellent but, like anything worthwhile, they come at a cost — as much as \$45,000 for each seminarian a year. The diocese funds tuition and other expenses, as well as student loan debt for men ordained after financing their own undergraduate education.

Thank you for your gift to *Encountering Christ*, and for investing in the priesthood and the men being formed to serve as our shepherds.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Father Jonathan Raia
Vocation Director



DIOCESE OF AUSTIN
6225 E US 290 HWY SVRD EB
AUSTIN, TX 78723
encounteringchristcampaign.org
(512) 949-2400

Final wave of parishes launching the *Encountering Christ* campaign

The third and final wave of *Encountering Christ* launches this summer, and the campaign is on track to meet its \$85 million goal.

“Our diocese is blessed with generous faithful who embraced this campaign as an opportunity to strengthen our church for future generations,” said Bishop Joe Vásquez. “I am personally grateful for their many sacrifices to ensure the success of *Encountering Christ*.”



Bishop Joe Vásquez blesses an *Encountering Christ* volunteer at a campaign event.

Pastors and hundreds of volunteers from the 24 Wave 3 parishes will attend four Campaign Executive Committee orientations at the beginning of August, at St. John Neumann Parish in Austin, St. William Parish in Round Rock, St. Jerome Parish in Waco, and St. Mary’s Catholic Center in College Station.

Father Patrick Ebner has been conferring with his pastoral and finance councils about how Holy Family Parish in Copperas Cove will use its share of campaign funds. They plan to beautify the church sanctuary with new LED lighting, sacred artwork and stained glass windows to “uplift the parish spiritually,” as well as purchase new and permanent hymnals and missalettes.

The stained glass windows will be handmade in Bryan, Texas, and the parish hopes to feature St. Cecilia, the patron saint of musicians, and St. Michael the Archangel, the patron saint of the military, for nearby Fort Hood and its parishioners who are members of military families.

Encountering Christ’s support for diocesan needs, such as seminarians and the poor through Catholic Charities of Central Texas, is also vitally important, Father Ebner said. “I see the need for the campaign, for the sacrificing of your time and talents and treasure to work for a need that no one parish can do on its own.”

More than 12,000 families from parishes throughout the diocese have contributed \$64.6 million to the campaign — 76 percent of goal — since Bishop Vásquez launched the capital and endowment campaign in January 2018 to fulfill many of the goals of the Diocesan Pastoral Plan. Each gift to *Encountering Christ* helps support seminarians and retired priests; strengthen Catholic education, faith formation and discipleship; care for those in need; and provide for local needs at parishes.

Pastors and hundreds of volunteers from the 24 Wave 3 parishes will attend four Campaign Executive Committee

Your campaign gifts are supporting our priests



Encountering Christ funds have already been directed to the seminarian endowment and the pension plan and trust for retired priests.

and to provide additional support for the increasing number of men who enter the seminary with student loan debt.

In addition, \$1 million in campaign funds have been added to the pension plan and trust for retired priests. A total of \$5 million from *Encountering Christ* will help meet the anticipated shortfall of this pension plan and trust, which provides a steady income that retired priests use for their housing and living expenses.

Lastly, plans for the expansion of the St. John Paul II Residence for Priests are well underway. The diocese is allocating \$2 million from *Encountering Christ* to construct four additional duplexes to bring the capacity to 24. As of this moment, plans are being finalized with the architect so construction can begin later this fall. All eight new units are scheduled for completion by early summer 2020.

Encountering Christ is already benefiting the clergy of our diocese — a key component of the campaign.

Of the \$5 million the campaign will direct toward the seminarian endowment, \$1 million is already being used to encourage vocations, to offset the cost of education and formation and reduce the financial effect on seminarians,

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT | St. Peter the Apostle's Campaign Executive Committee

When health issues required Father Ruben Patino to scale back on his duties at St. Paul the Apostle Parish, the Campaign Executive Committee continued his work and helped the Horseshoe Bay parish raise 113 percent of its *Encountering Christ* goal.

“That’s the miracle and that’s the beauty of community — when that community can act like one, even when some of its members are missing,” said Frank Trogus, campaign co-chair with Ed Wenzel.

“The group that Father put together really worked together in his absence,” Ed added. “We nudged the campaign forward.”

When Father Patino was unable to be physically present, he continued to be active in campaign decisions and encouraged the committee’s progress. In addition to meeting with their fellow parishioners, committee

members took turns delivering campaign messages at Masses and leading the congregation in the campaign prayer.

The committee decided to focus as much on participation as meeting the parish goal. “We always talked about prayerfully considering just participating and if you decline a financial gift, you can participate by praying for us,” Ed said.

Nearly 40 percent of parish families pledged their support to *Encountering Christ*, but he estimated that the number of parishioners praying for the campaign doubled that number.

St. Paul the Apostle is directing its share of campaign funds toward expanding the parish, both to repay debt incurred from completed facility expansions to better meet the congregation’s needs, as well as to begin the project’s third phase.



Father Ruben Patino and his faithful community at St. Paul the Apostle Parish.

Those *Encountering Christ* funds will allow for the addition of a narthex, confessional, reconciliation room, sacristy, increased seating areas and much-needed restrooms.

Frank stressed that the entire parish community led to the campaign’s success, not only the Campaign Executive Committee.

“It was truly an amazing effort of community,” he said. “This was truly the work of the Holy Spirit.”