

Witness to



*The Catholic Diocese of Lansing*

**St. Thomas the Apostle Parish  
Ann Arbor, Michigan**

**Feasibility Study Report**

June 29, 2016

## **Introduction**

*Greater Mission* is pleased to present St. Thomas the Apostle this feasibility study report. It has been a pleasure to work with Fr. Ashbaugh, Rob Hohler and the many lay leaders of the parish 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 mini-Feasibility Study as part of the process for a Combined Campaign for the Witness to Hope campaign. The study was designed to determine if a successful Combined campaign could be conducted to raise \$3.65 million or more to complete some significant renovation and restoration efforts at the parish and to create a parish endowment for the future. Anthony T. Gwiazdowski, Executive Vice-President & Partner of *Greater Mission* and Patricia O'Hearn, Director of Development for the Diocese of Lansing conducted the study during the May 2016. There were several major components of the study process:

## **Case Development & Material Development**

A meeting was conducted with Fr. Ashbaugh, Fr. Todd and Rob Hohler to discuss the project, parish history, and the ministry needs of the parish. During this meeting a preliminary case statement was reviewed, edited and approved by Fr. Ashbaugh and Rob Hohler. The case described the restoration and renovation of the Church, school, parking lots and several other facilities at the parish and the use of funds to establish an endowment for future capital needs and the case for support for the wider Church through Witness to Hope. The total cost of the parish projects is estimated at \$2.56 million. A copy of the case statement, gift table and interview questionnaire are attached to the report.

## **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. In addition to including significant offertory supporters to the interview list a number of names from the *DonorSearch* process were added to the interview list.

## **Individual Interviews**

Tony Gwiazdowski and Patricia O'Hearn conducted 16 interviews with a total of 22 parishioners of St. Thomas the Apostle 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 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 Meeting**

The entire parish community was offered the opportunity to participate in Town Hall meetings on Sunday, May 15 and Tuesday, May 17 at the parish community center. Approximately 75 parishioners or roughly 4% of the registered families attended the 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. Ashbaugh and Kevin Grabowski, of Conrad Schmidt Studios gave a brief presentation and Tony Gwiazdowski gathered input from those in attendance by asking several open-ended questions to begin the discussion. Then specific questions were answered in writing. Of those who attended, 50 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 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and was made available online. A total of 18 parishioners completed the in-pew survey after the pastor gave a brief explanation of the project and 111 completed the on-line survey. This represents a total of 7% of the registered families. The responses from the survey cards and the online survey results were tabulated and have been incorporated into the study results.

## **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?

The parishioners interviewed have been members of the parish from as few as 8 years to over 50 years at the parish. Parishioners gave a variety of answers to this question but the following are those cited most often:

Most Frequently Cited:
This is a friendly and welcoming community.
Our church is beautiful, very historic.
A very traditional Catholic parish. Strong Catholic values.
The parish has many young families, which is good for the future.
The people here are wonderful.
The parish has great energy.
We are multi-generational and very diverse parish.
Father Bill is a very good pastor and Fr. Todd is a great young priest.
We have great ministries and liturgies.
We have a superb school.

### 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:
Our physical plant is old and needs work.
Poor parking.
Not a neighborhood parish, people need to come here and effects attendance.
Fewer Young People Participating.
Raising Funds.
Lack of Generosity.
Lack of Volunteers.
Cost of the school, can we continue to sustain it?
Need for more youth activities.
Many fixed incomes; older people can't pay for it all.

### 3. What is your initial reaction to the case that has been presented to you? The parish project? The case for the wider Church?

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 strong overall support for the case as presented. The Individual Interviews allowed for more discussion regarding the diocesan case, the following are the responses and some frequently cited comments:

### Individual Interviews (Parish Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Response
Yes	19	90%
No	0	0%
Unsure	2	10%

### Individual Interviews (Diocesan Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	12	75%
No	0	0%
Unsure	4	25%

### Town Hall (Support Total Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	45	92%
No	0	0%
Unsure	4	8%

### In-Pew/On-Line (Support Total Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	82	68%
No	13	11%
Unsure	25	21%

### Most Frequently Cited: Individual Interviews Only

Parish Case is really needed.

Understand and support the Wider Church Case.

The work on the outside of church and school is needed.

The beautification portion of the case is tough to support.

Diocesan case is forward thinking.

\$700,000 for painting is too much; we could use that money for the poor or the school.

I support the diocese and its effort to support evangelization.

Not sure we should be doing this with the diocese.

We can do this if we all pitch in.

**4. Do you think the parish can raise \$3.65 million for the needs presented in the case statement?**

**Individual Interviews**

<b>Raise the Funds</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	7	44%
<b>No</b>	1	6%
<b>Unsure</b>	8	50%

In general, parishioners interviewed felt that the goal was achievable but that it was a stretch. Most who felt the goal was achievable indicated that it would only be possible with very high participation. Some people cited that coming so close to the end of the debt reduction effort that it might affect the campaign and others expressed concerns about the cost of the Church beautification and if it was a real priority. Others respondents mentioned that sharing funds with the wider Church needs to be clearly explained.

**Town Hall Meeting**

<b>Raise the Funds</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	26	52%
<b>No</b>	2	4%
<b>Unsure</b>	22	44%

The Town Hall meeting offered the opportunity for verbal reaction to the goal. The parishioners present offered some commentary on the goal. As is typical of this format the response level for “unsure” was nearly equal to those who felt the goal was achievable.

**In-Pew/On-Line Survey**

<b>Raise the Funds</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	35	30%
<b>No</b>	22	19%
<b>Unsure</b>	60	51%

The In-Pew/On-Line survey did not allow for additional comment on the goal.

In general, the analysis of the responses indicates that the parishioners feel the goal is attainable with the normal level of uncertainty. However, the consistency of discussion in the individual interviews and town hall meetings indicate that parishioners feel that high participation is essential. The biggest concerns voiced by people regarding the goal were the closeness to the last campaign and the cost of the beautification project. Many people felt the painting is not needed and the goal either should be lowered or that those funds should be used for the school or to help the poor.

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

**Individual Interviews**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	15	94%
No	0	0%
Unsure	1	6%

**Town Hall Meeting**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	46	92%
No	0	0%
Unsure	4	8%

**In-Pew/On-Line Survey**

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	88	80%
No	4	4%
Unsure	18	16%

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of parishioners who responded indicated that they would provide financial support for the campaign. These are very high positive figures. It should be noted however, that about 25% to 30% of those who responded that they would support the campaign with a gift noted a concern about supporting the beautification project and some also noted concern about supporting the diocese.

**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	2	2	\$200,000
\$50,000	3	5	\$450,000
\$25,000	13	18	\$775,000
\$10,000	11	29	\$885,000
\$5,000	15	44	\$960,000
\$3,000	27	71	\$1,041,000
\$1,500	39	110	\$1,099,500
Less than \$1,500	50	160	\$1,149,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>\$1,149,500</b>

The cumulative totals noted in the table above are responses from all levels of contact. A total of 182 individual parishioners participated in the study and 88% (160) indicated a gift level. The 160 responses represent 10% of the total parish families and 18% of the regular contributors to the parish. The average gift noted in the responses is \$7,184. To achieve the full \$3.65 million goal the St. Thomas the Apostle would need to achieve a 35%+ rate of participation with the average gift noted above. This would require several six -figure gifts of which 2 were identified.

**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 and the Finance Committee in a separate memorandum.

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

<b>Volunteer</b>	<b># of Responses</b>	<b>% of Responses</b>
<b>Yes</b>	53	29%
<b>No</b>	75	42%
<b>Unsure</b>	52	29%

The highest level of volunteerism came from the individual interviews where over 70% of those participating indicated that they would provide some level of involvement. The lowest level came from the in-pew/on-line survey where little explanation of the roles was available. These response rates are very positive and indicate 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 and the Finance Committee under separate cover.

**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. Some of the responses by parishioners were extremely positive and supportive and some voiced very negative opinions. Parishioners are very pleased with the clergy leadership of Father Bill and Father Todd. They love the parish, feel the spiritual and 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 campaign, the cost of the beautification of the Church and its necessity and participating in the diocesan campaign.

The following are the most frequently cited comments:
Father must clearly take the lead and explain why this is needed.
This must be very well communicated.
Case needs to be explained in detail.
The message must be very clear and consistent.
We need to have everyone participate not just the regulars.
No Murals, a waste of money!
Use funds for the school not paintings.
The diocese needs to explain why it needs this money.
I love the mural.
Great to be part of a historic effort.
Young families need to be involved.
The study results must be published.
This will be a stretch but can be done through prayer and hard work.
Should not be doing as a Combined Campaign
Can we afford to do this?
"Seek the Kingdom of God and all else will be given to you."

### **Conclusions to the Findings**

There are so many positives things to mention about St. Thomas the Apostle parish. I was touched by the deep spirituality of the people and their support of Fr. Bill. So many parishioners mentioned that Fr. Bill has provided superb spiritual and administrative leadership for the parish. Both Fr. Bill and Fr. Todd are widely regarded by the parishioners as excellent priests and pastor. Parishioners are looking with a keen eye for Fr. Bill's leadership as a lynchpin for this campaign. While there are many lay leaders who have been part of the process to address the needs of the parish, there were many parishioners who were unaware that these lay leaders were involved.

The number of people who overtly mentioned they would volunteer to assist the campaign is strong. There was a significant number willing to open their homes for gatherings or to serve at large parish gatherings to advocate for the campaign. While the entire volunteer team has not been filled, in a parish of this size counsel is convinced that recruiting a full team could be achieved. The motivation of the people to work together on this project is very strong.

The findings of the study also show that there is good Lead Gift potential in this parish at this time. Counsel has no doubt that a campaign to raise funds for the much of the restoration and renovation projects highlighted in the case will receive wide support. The study has received responses from approximately 10% 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 constitute a reasonable sampling of the parish. The study has identified \$1,149,500 in potential gifts. The average gift identified in the study is \$7,184. Two of the gifts that were identified are at the \$100,000 level. Our donor research indicates that there are several parishioners who are rated above this level, two of whom are significant contributors to the parish and diocese.

While there is strong support for the overall parish case, two elements are not as widely seen as necessary. The first is the beautification project. About a third of the parishioners who participated in the study either commented or wrote that they felt this was not a priority need nor was it a prudent use of \$700,000. Many respondents commented that if the parish were to raise \$700,000 it could be better used to support other needs like the school or the poor. The parish endowment also received some less than supportive comments, as did the notion of the diocese setting up endowments. Some people commented that they philosophically don't favor endowments for a variety of reasons. The number of people who made these comments was far fewer and less adamant about their concerns than those who commented on the beautification. Several of those who opposed the beautification noted they would be less likely to make a gift or make a more substantial gift if it were included in the final case. This strong and specific concern by as many as a third of the respondents clearly identifies a significant trend and finding in the study.

St. Thomas the Apostle is a fairly affluent, highly educated and deeply committed Catholic community. The people of the parish who are not supportive of the beautification strongly believe that they are in a parish that is focused on living the Gospel message and that the resources of the Church should be used for purposes that spread Christ's message. While most agree the parish beautification is wonderful, they simply cannot justify the use of funds for that purpose while there are so many other needs. It is counsel's opinion based on past experience that including this case element will be an impediment to a successful campaign to meet the other pressing needs of the parish and the wider Church.

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

### **Recommendations**

1. At the present time we propose that the parish consider setting a Witness to Hope Campaign Goal of \$3,000,000 and eliminating the beautification project from the case. This goal would be 2x the present parish offertory and would provide \$1.89 million in parish share to the parish. This would allow the parish to meet the other needs listed in the case that received very wide support from the parishioners who responded.
2. Counsel recommends building an aggressive gift table for the campaign that will stimulate broad based sacrificial support. This gift chart must challenge the entire community to support the campaign at levels that will be sufficient to achieve the goal and promote strong participation at every giving level.
3. We recommend that the parish begin a communication effort to inform current parishioners of the results of the feasibility study and that their concerns and input has been taken into consideration.

4. Counsel recommends that the parish work closely with counsel to begin an education and communication process that will provide them with information about the parish project and the importance of the Witness to Hope campaign.
5. Counsel believes that there are many parishioners who would consider a Legacy Gift to the campaign and to the parish and that the Legacy Gift component of the campaign should be pursued with some vigor during the campaign process.

### **Final Thoughts**

There are many optimal factors pointing to the potential success of a campaign. Great leadership, a well-defined and understood case, sufficient volunteers and the capacity to make significant sacrificial gifts are all needed to conduct a successful campaign effort. St. Thomas the Apostle has all of these elements present. We look forward to working with the St. Thomas the Apostle parish community.