

BUILDING PROJECT – HISTORY, RESEARCH, & PLAN

A VERSION OF THIS WAS PRESENTED ON 1/22 & 1/25

How did we get here?

I first thought about a building project when I arrived in June 2014 and heard about the attempts to build a gym in the late 1990s or early 2000s. Even as I thought to myself, “Let’s build a gym!” I was also aware that classroom space was going to be an issue if we continued to grow. At the time, we had 91 K-8 students and 124 total (compared to 113 / 154 now). Nevertheless, I had no idea how to tackle such an expansion and I was also just beginning my first pastoral assignment.

When Mr. Trost gave his gift of \$1 million in January 2015, he approached me about what our capital needs might be. Like me, he first thought of a gym. But he also said that no matter the need, he would like to help.

I began to brainstorm and gather data so that we could be ready to make use of a second gift from Mr. Trost whenever it might appear. In November and December 2015, I communicated with the diocese, asked for permission to hire an architect, and provided data to back up my request.

The proposal I sent the diocese:

- detailed the inadequacies of our current facilities (e.g., small gym, lack of adequate instructional space, etc.),
- identified potential hurdles (e.g., the location of the septic system),
- explained our current (healthy) financial footing,
- noted the expenses and costs of staffing additional classrooms and showed how these recurring costs could be met, and
- showed why we had been successful in expanding enrollment and factors for why such growth would likely continue.

The diocese asked me to move forward with hiring an architect and forming a building committee to develop a master plan which could

be implemented in phases so as to accurately predict construction costs while also avoiding a haphazard approach to current and future expansion.

In January 2016, KAP Architecture of Champaign was hired and a committee formed. At the same time, some initial inquiries were made with a handful of families to gauge financial support for such a project. Feedback was very positive even though plans necessarily remained vague.

The architect developed a plan based upon our specifications and with our frequent input: two to three classrooms, gym & locker rooms, a stage, and storage space. In May 2016, the master plan was finalized and any necessary improvements to the current building were also identified (these were minimal, other than the roof).

The plan suggests moving the administrative offices to a more central location and connecting these to any kind of faculty resource room. This necessitated the relocation of the main entrance so as to be more centrally located and close to the administration. Three classrooms were designed with preschool in mind; these rooms also have adjoining bathrooms. This entire wing was designed to slant at a slight angle in order to make the entire building more welcoming while also clearly identifying the entrance. The gymnasium was designed to have a high school size court and the stage would be simple but functional for our needs. The locker rooms are equipped with showers not so much for the kids but in case we ever decided to host overnight retreats for high school or college students.

The estimated cost for the full master plan to be implemented (including soft costs) would run anywhere from \$3.5 to \$4.6 million. However, a first phase consisting of just the classroom wing would be closer to \$1.5 to \$2 million (including the cost of replacing the school roof).

In September 2016, I was able to form a Feasibility Study Committee and we interviewed three companies eventually agreeing to hire Meier Jost and Associates. The purpose of the feasibility study was to gauge our ability to raise the approximately \$1 million to supplement Mr. Trost's gift for the completion of the classroom wing.

What did we learn?

Fifty-one households were invited to be interviewed by Meier Jost and Associates. In an effort to avoid duplicate perspectives, these fifty-one were selected to represent a cross section of the parish and school populations. While a minimum of thirty interviews were needed, thirty-five were completed.

Interviewees were presented with the complete design (wing and gym) and costs (\$4.6 million) of the proposed project and then asked a variety of questions in order to gather data on fourteen key metrics. This information was provided in previous bulletins in December and January.

In all but three of these metrics, St. Thomas exceeded the company's benchmarks. The three metrics in question all concerned money: (1) The perception of the cost, (2) the potential to attract large monetary gifts (>\$25,000), and (3) the potential to reach or exceed the campaign dollar goal of \$3.6 million, Mr. Trost having already given us \$1 million.

Based upon the gathered information, Meier Jost & Associates recommended several action items:

- Results of the study should be shared with the parish and school
- A campaign goal of \$1.155 million should be set based upon a combination of input from interviewees and industry standards.
- Given the goal, the study confirmed our instincts that it is best to move forward with just the classroom wing at this point.
- Initiate a six month capital campaign. Any delay can create a vacuum in which unhelpful rumors and speculation take hold.

What now?

Per Meier Jost and Associates' (a.k.a., Capital Campaigns Midwest) recommendation, a six month campaign will be initiated consisting of three phases: (1) Organization and Early Gifts, (2) General Gifts, and (3) Extraordinary Gifts.

Prospective donors will be asked to make a gift spread over five years in order to help limit their risk. A 20-25% down payment is welcomed but not required.

In order to break ground, a parish typically must have 100% of funds pledged and 50% in hand. However, sometimes the diocese requires a higher amount to be in hand. A discussion about this requirement will take place with the diocese in the springtime.

Even before an architect is hired the building committee will reconvene to discuss, fine tune, and finalize our design requirements for the architect. After an architect is hired and blueprints drawn up, then the project can go out for bid.

The hope is that we can break ground next January (if the weather cooperates) and have the new classrooms available for school in August 2018.

If we receive the go-ahead, then a bridge loan can be requested to help finance the project and then the loan can be paid off as pledges are received. In no way will the parish or school incur long term debt for this project.

**However, to make any of this a reality
WE NEED VOLUNTEERS.**

**About thirty are needed to help solicit the donations. Those who volunteer will go through an orientation, choose who they will call upon, and then complete the calls.
All gifts will remain completely confidential.**

Call the Parish (684-5107) if interested.