

May 2019

Dear Friends,

When I learned that *Encountering Christ* would benefit our diocese’s retired priests through the expansion of the St. John Paul II Residence for Priests, I was overjoyed. This residential center is an important ministry to our retired priests — and is now at capacity.

Priests dedicate their lives to their parishes and, in gratitude for their vocation, these communities care for them throughout their active ministry. But after so many years of sacrifices, many of these men find themselves alone. At the residence, our retired priests celebrate daily Mass, share meals and enjoy fellowship with their brother priests. They are a family and a community.

It is heartbreaking to have to turn a priest away because we lack the space for them at the St. John Paul II Residence for Priests. Thank you for your sacrificial gifts to this campaign, and for helping us take care of these men who served us all so well.

Sincerely yours in Christ,



Deacon Mike Aaronson  
Minister to Retired Priests



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

## Parishes build on *Encountering Christ* excitement for significant projects

When Bishop Joe Vásquez announced his plans for *Encountering Christ*, Father James Misko realized the campaign was an opportunity for St. Louis King of France Parish in Austin to replace its aging activity center while supporting the diocese.

“We thought that if we were going to put forth the energy and the effort required to raise that kind of money, then we would go all the way and try to do something really big,” said Father Misko, pastor and vicar general for the diocese.

St. Louis is one of several parishes in the diocese conducting an independent parish campaign to raise extraordinary funds for parish projects — two to three times the parish offertory or more — alongside *Encountering Christ*. These independent campaigns have *Encountering Christ* as a component, with parishes contributing the same percentage of their assigned goal for the shared ministries in the diocesan case statement.

Through *Missio 2020*, St. Louis will address four pillars through its \$7.5 million goal. Along with building a new parish activity center, the existing center will be



St. Paul Chong Hasang Parish in Harker Heights is building a new religious formation center and supporting *Encountering Christ* with funds raised through its *Building a Legacy for Our Future* campaign.

renovated into a performing arts center with a theater for the school, a new social ministry center will be built as an addition to the parish offices, and the parking lot will be expanded.

St. Paul Chong Hasang Parish in Harker Heights decided to combine its need of a new religious formation center with *Encountering Christ*.

“We were planning to have a capital campaign,” said Buzz Gilliland, the parish’s business administrator. “Our current building is not sufficient to house all of our students.”

Parishioners have contributed 118 percent of *Building a Legacy for Our Future*’s \$2.4 million goal, which has already allowed St. Paul Chong Hasang to begin construction on a 7,200-square-foot religious formation center to better accommodate the more than 300 children enrolled in faith formation. Fulfilled campaign pledges have also eliminated \$300,000 in debt incurred from building a parish center, and the remaining funds will be used to bolster the facility maintenance fund and finish securing the campus with wrought iron fencing, as well as benefit *Encountering Christ*.

“Everyone understood the needs the diocese identified in the *Encountering Christ* campaign,” he said. “Our parishioners have always been responsive and very generous with the church.”

## Encountering Christ to expand residence for retired priests



The holy men who dedicate their lives to serving us need our support in all stages of their journey, from their seminary years through retirement.

Our diocese currently has 38 retired priests, with another 41 within 10 years of retirement. Even when their years of active ministry end, these men never retire from their vocation to the priesthood, often continuing to serve in parishes and living a life of prayer.

The diocese will allocate \$2 million from *Encountering Christ* to construct four additional duplexes to accommodate another eight priests, bringing the capacity to 24.

Since most priests reside in rectories, many lack housing once they retire from pastoral ministry. The St. John Paul II Residence for Priests provides a comfortable home and close-knit community for 16 retired priests of our diocese. They share Mass, meals and activities; access transportation to and from appointments; and receive care and support for medical needs. Residents benefit from the balance of independent living and fellowship.

The residence will not have room for the number of priests who will retire in the coming years. The diocese will allocate \$2 million from *Encountering Christ* to construct four additional duplexes to accommodate another eight priests, bringing the capacity to 24.

### DONOR PROFILE | Rob and Leslie Suffoletta

Rob Suffoletta has made practice of keeping in touch with the many priests who have influenced his faith over the years, “to make them understand that they’re appreciated.”

He and his wife, Leslie, members of St. Theresa Parish in Austin, feel strongly about supporting priests as they get older and need a place to retire. Knowing *Encountering Christ* funds will be used to expand the St. John Paul II Residence for Priests helped influence their sacrificial gift to the campaign.

‘These men give decades of their life to serving us.’

“These men give decades of their life to serving us as parishioners and serving the Catholic community,” he said. “It’s important for all Catholics to help take care of them and provide them with housing, meals and community in their retirement, given everything that they’ve given to us.”

Rob and Leslie were also inspired that *Encountering Christ* will benefit the education of seminarians and Catholic schoolchildren.

“These are things that have long-term value to the Catholic community,” Rob said. “These initiatives are going to help grow the diocese and enable people to better practice their faith.”



Rob and Leslie Suffoletta