

Witness to
H O P E
The Catholic Diocese of Lansing

**St. Mark the Evangelist Parish
Goodrich, Michigan
Feasibility Study Report**

June 22, 2016

Introduction

Greater Mission is pleased to present St. Mark the Evangelist this feasibility study report. It has been a pleasure to work with Fr. Kuchar, Sue Griffith, Sharon Roberts 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 \$1 million or more to complete several infrastructure projects at the parish, most notably the resurfacing of the parking lots and interior restoration work in the Church. 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. Kuchar and members of the Finance and Building Committees 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. Kuchar. The case described the desire to reconstruct and restripe the parking lots, including the need to address storm water management to safely manage run-off. Other projects included upgrading the interior of the Church with significant ceiling repairs, new lighting and a new sound system. Finally, and if funds are available based on the results of this study, an upgrade of the restroom sinks, faucets and toilets and the addition of an exterior rest room and storage for the outside activity areas. The case stated, "our priority is to only fund what we can afford with the first priorities being our parking lots and the Church". The total cost of all of these projects was estimated at \$800,000. 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.

Individual Interviews

Tony Gwiazdowski and Patricia O'Hearn conducted 15 interviews with a total of 21 parishioners from St. Mark the Evangelist 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 a Town Hall meeting on Tuesday, May 24th at the parish community center. A total of 25 parishioners or about 6% of the registered families attended the meeting. The meeting 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. Kuchar open the meeting with a prayer and a brief introduction and Tony Gwiazdowski presented information about the campaign and 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 12 parishioners completed survey forms and those responses have been used as part of the data collection for this study.

In-Pew Survey/On-Line Survey

A seven-question survey form was distributed at all Masses on the weekend of June 4th and 5th and was made available online. A total of 66 parishioners completed the in-pew survey after the pastor gave a brief explanation of the project and 8 completed the on-line survey. This represents a total of 18% of the registered families. The responses from the survey cards were tabulated and have been incorporated into the study results. A copy of the in-pew survey is attached to this report.

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 1 year to being among the founders of 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.
The small parish size.
Commitment of people to each other and the parish.
Father is a very good pastor.
Deacon Ron.
We are a family.

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:
The Parish is aging.
We need young families.
The timing of the campaign.
Lost many members a few years back and we need to get them back.
Lack of Volunteers.
Financial challenge, we have many fixed incomes, need the young families to support this.
Father can be tough, needs to let people lead.
Concerns over future of the parish.

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. In general parishioners are keenly aware of the need to refurbish the parking lot and to some degree are supportive of the interior work in the Church, but not all are in favor of spending funds on the interior bathroom work and for those opposed, an even stronger negative reaction to the outdoor bathrooms and storage work. The diocesan case was well received during the interviews once questions were answered with most people indicating that they were in favor of some if not all elements of the case.

Individual Interviews (Parish Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Response
Yes	15	100%
No	0	0%
Unsure	0	0%

Individual Interviews (Diocesan Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	11	73%
No	1	7%
Unsure	3	20%

Town Hall (Support Total Case)

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	8	67%
No	1	8%
Unsure	3	25%

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

Response	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	47	64%
No	5	7%
Unsure	22	29%

Most Frequently Cited: Individual Interviews Only

Parish Case is really needed.
The diocesan case makes sense.
The parking lot and interior of the church work is needed.
People will relate to the projects.
Diocesan case is forward thinking.
Concerned about being able to pay for all this; do we need it all now?
We don't need to upgrade the bathrooms or build one outside.
Support some but not all of diocesan case.
I support the diocese and its effort to support evangelization.
We can do this if we all pitch in.

4. Do you think the parish can raise \$1 million for the needs presented in the case statement?

Individual Interviews

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	10	75%
No	0	0%
Unsure	5	25%

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. Many of those in favor also questioned whether the parish needed to raise that much money. Again, this was a result of their comments regarding whether the entire parish case needed to be done all at one time. Some people questioned the notion of the combined campaign but this was not a widespread feeling among the interviewees.

Town Hall Meeting

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	3	27%
No	2	18%
Unsure	6	55%

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 greater than those who felt the goal was achievable.

In-Pew/On-Line Survey

Raise the Funds	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	28	38%
No	14	19%
Unsure	31	42%

The In-Pew survey did not allow for additional comment on the case.

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 comments about the goal being a stretch or concern over younger families being able to be generous are very consistent and demonstrate a general sense that the parish is being supported by a limited number of people. While this is not unusual it does indicate that an effort to create an atmosphere for high participation will be essential. The concern about some elements of the case being less than high priority should also be taken into consideration as parishioners evaluated their response to this question.

5. Would you support this campaign financially?

Individual Interviews

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	15	100%
No	0	0%
Unsure	0	0%

Town Hall Meeting

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	8	73%
No	1	9%
Unsure	2	18%

In-Pew/On-Line Survey

Support Financially	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	49	68%
No	2	3%
Unsure	21	29%

Clearly, the overwhelming majority of parishioners who responded indicated that they would provide financial support for the campaign. The parish case is viewed as needed and important to the future of the parish. The minimal number of people who indicated they would not support the campaign at all is remarkable.

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	0	0	\$0
\$50,000	1	1	\$50,000
\$25,000	5	6	\$175,000
\$10,000	5	11	\$225,000
\$5,000	9	20	\$270,000
\$3,000	13	33	\$309,000
\$1,500	18	51	\$336,000
Less than \$1,500	37	88	\$398,000
Total	88	88	\$373,000

The cumulative totals noted in the table above are responses from all levels of contact. A total of 120 individual parishioners participated in the study and 73% (88) indicated a gift level. The 88 responses represent 22% of the total parish families and 34% of the regular contributors to the parish. The average gift noted in the responses is \$4,238. Based on the responses to the study question, typical participation rates and the fact that some elements of the parish case are in question a counsel does not believe that a goal of \$1,000,000 is advisable.

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)

Volunteer	# of Responses	% of Responses
Yes	18	19%
No	46	49%
Unsure	29	31%

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 typical and indicate that with proper explanation that a sufficient number of volunteers to conduct the campaign is likely.

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 Kuchar 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. In general, counsel would characterize the comments as more favorable than unfavorable towards the campaign. Enough people commented to merit sharing that parishioners are concerned that some of the parish case elements, namely the renovation of the interior bathrooms, the construction of an outdoor bathroom and storage area are not truly needed by the parish. As is typical not every element of the diocesan case received universal support and there are still questions to be answered by parishioners regarding this portion of the case but in general the diocesan case was seen as more positive than negative. Older parishioners do not want to shoulder the entire load of the campaign and feel strongly that younger families must support this effort generously. A few parishioners voiced concern about conducting this campaign as part of a combined effort with the diocese and several voiced concern over not going into debt.

The following are the most frequently cited comments:
Listen to the advice that people give, don't just plow ahead.
Have Father keep doing what he is doing, he is a good leader and people will follow him.
Father must clearly take the lead and explain why this is needed.
Good communication will be needed throughout the campaign.
The parking lot and the interior are the only things we need to do.
The parking lot is the only thing we need to do.
It is a privilege to be a member of this parish and we must carry on its legacy.
The spiritual approach outlined makes sense.
Father needs to embrace the project.
Don't pressure people; be kind.
Father can't micromanage he needs to trust his leaders.
No hard sell!

Conclusions to the Findings

There are so many positives things to mention about St. Mark the Evangelist parish. The love and respect for Father Kuchar is very strong. So many parishioners mentioned that Fr. Kuchar has provided superb spiritual and administrative leadership for the parish. Fr. Kuchar is widely regarded by the parishioners as an excellent priest and pastor. Parishioners are looking with a keen eye for his leadership as a lynchpin for this campaign.

The parish leadership has done a remarkable job in its due diligence to present to the people key priorities that have been well researched and well within normal cost levels. This effort has not gone unnoticed by many in the parish and will help assuage any concerns about the projects should they arise.

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 limited Lead Gift potential in this parish at this time. Counsel has no doubt that a campaign to raise funds for the parking lot and interior renovation will receive a very high level of participation, but there is concern that all of the projects are not needed. There is extremely strong support for the parking lot repair and the interior restoration. These projects total approximately \$600,000 of the \$800,000 projected for the parish share. With some of the strong concern about the necessity of renovating the interior bathrooms and building exterior bathrooms and outdoor storage, counsel suggests that these case elements be removed as priority projects that would only be funded if the parish were to oversubscribe its goal.

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 \$900,000. This goal would be slightly more than 3x the present parish offertory and would provide \$665,000 in parish share to the parish. This sum would provide for resources to complete the parking lot and interior work as outlined in the case. The case statement could be written to indicate that if the parish were to raise more than \$900,000 the funds would be used to complete the remaining projects. However, counsel would suggest that there is not very strong support for these case elements for these projects. We respectfully suggest that you may wish to consider the use of “over goal funds” for a capital repairs endowment or something similar in nature.
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 overcome the lack of Lead Tier prospects and enhance Base and Mid Tier giving to the campaign.
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.

Final Thoughts

There are many optimal factors pointing to the potential success of a campaign at St. Mark the Evangelist parish. Strong parishioner willingness to provide financial support and volunteerism are crucial factors but lack of widespread support for some of the case elements are cause for caution. Our recommendation to move forward at a lower goal does not preclude that the full project cannot be completed but the community would need to be convinced that the bathroom and outdoor projects are a major priority. We look forward to working with the leadership and people of the St. Mark the Evangelist in the coming months.