

**ST. MARY MAGDALENE PARISH
FLINT, TX**

**The Proposed St. Mary Magdalene Parish Church,
Flint, Texas.**

A REPORT

Submitted to Most Rev. Joseph E. Strickland, DD, JCL
And the diocesan management team

By Rev. James M. Rowland, JCL
Pastor

2018

INTRODUCTION

This report has been compiled for Bishop Strickland at the request of Mr. Peter Kane, Managing Director of the Diocese of Tyler. Its purpose is to assist in the proper development of the diocese in general and the St. Mary Magdalene Parish in particular. Specifically, the report is to give a rationale for the size of the proposed church which had been determined by the previous pastor, Rev. Timothy Kelly, and the parish pastoral council.

The report will be divided into four main parts. Part I will be a statistical and demographic study on the Catholic population, the Mass going population, anticipated growth and so on, leading to the determination of the size of church needed. Part II will be a description of the capacity of the current parish church and the weekend Mass schedule. Part III will focus on Bishop Strickland's 2015 letter to Father Kelly. It will describe the current state of the project and fundraising efforts behind it, the architecture and style of the proposed church, and the estimated ongoing cost of the new church. Finally, Part IV will explore a possible fallback position.

A brief history of St. Mary Magdalene Parish:

St. Mary Magdalene Parish had its origins in 1998 when a group of the Catholic faithful in the Flint/Gresham area approached Bishop Edmund Carmody and asked for permission to establish a parish. The bishop began by allowing Mass to be celebrated in Flint each Sunday by the priests of the Cathedral. The first Mass was celebrated at the community center in Flint on Palm Sunday, 1998.

Work on securing property on which to build a permanent church began immediately. Once secured, planning and building soon followed. Before long the Catholic faithful were able to move out of the community center into a multi-purpose church / hall building. The church was placed under the patronage of St. Mary Magdalene. Bishop Alvaro Corrada dedicated the church and its altar in March 2001.

Father Tim Kelly, STL, was appointed as the first resident priest. When the quasi-parish or mission of St. Mary Magdalene was established and the end of 2005 he became its administrator. The territory of the new mission comprised of all of southwestern Smith County south of Highway 31, west of Highway 69, and outside Loop 323. A year later, on December

17, 2006, the bishop created the Parish of St. Mary Magdalene with Father Kelly appointed its first pastor.

The parish campus was expanded by the purchase of a number of residential properties on Crown Lane (CR 1299) and the parish began its first major development of bespoke buildings in 2007. This effort resulted in Peaches Hall, the Education Building, the parish offices and the courtyard. The new buildings were blessed by Bishop Corrada in May, 2008. The number of parishioners has continued to grow which has resulted in the development of plans for a new parish church that will accommodate the anticipated needs for the future.

On June 18th, 2017, some territory of St. Mary Magdalene Parish was ceded to a newly created parish, St. Boniface, in Chandler. The new boundaries of St. Mary Magdalene Parish are as follows: starting at the intersection of Highway 69 and the Smith-Cherokee County line, north on Highway 69 to Loop 323, to Highway 155, to Lake Placid Road (FM 1113), to the Smith-Henderson County line, to the Smith-Cherokee County line, and back to Highway 69.

In September 20017, the parish community bid farewell to Father Kelly as he began a new assignment and welcomed Father James Rowland, JCL, as its new pastor.

PART I – PARISH DEMOGRAPHICS

Catholic population and estimated Mass attendance:

Canon 518 states: “As a general rule a parish is to be territorial, that is, one which includes all the Christian faithful of a certain territory.” As noted in the “brief history” the boundaries of St. Mary Magdalene Parish have been described as starting at the intersection of Highway 69 and the Smith-Cherokee County line, north on Highway 69 to Loop 323, to Highway 155, to Lake Placid Road (FM 1113), to the Smith-Henderson County line, to the Smith-Cherokee County line, and back to Highway 69. To arrive at a reasonable estimate of the Catholic population this report is using data freely available on the internet that is broken down according to population within ZIP code areas. Within the boundaries of the parish is 95% of ZIP code 75762 (population 11,843);¹ 5% of 75709 (253);² 33% of 75703 (12,265);³ and 15% of 75757 (1,503).⁴ Thus the estimated overall population of the parish is 25,864.

¹ <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/75762/>

² <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/75709/>

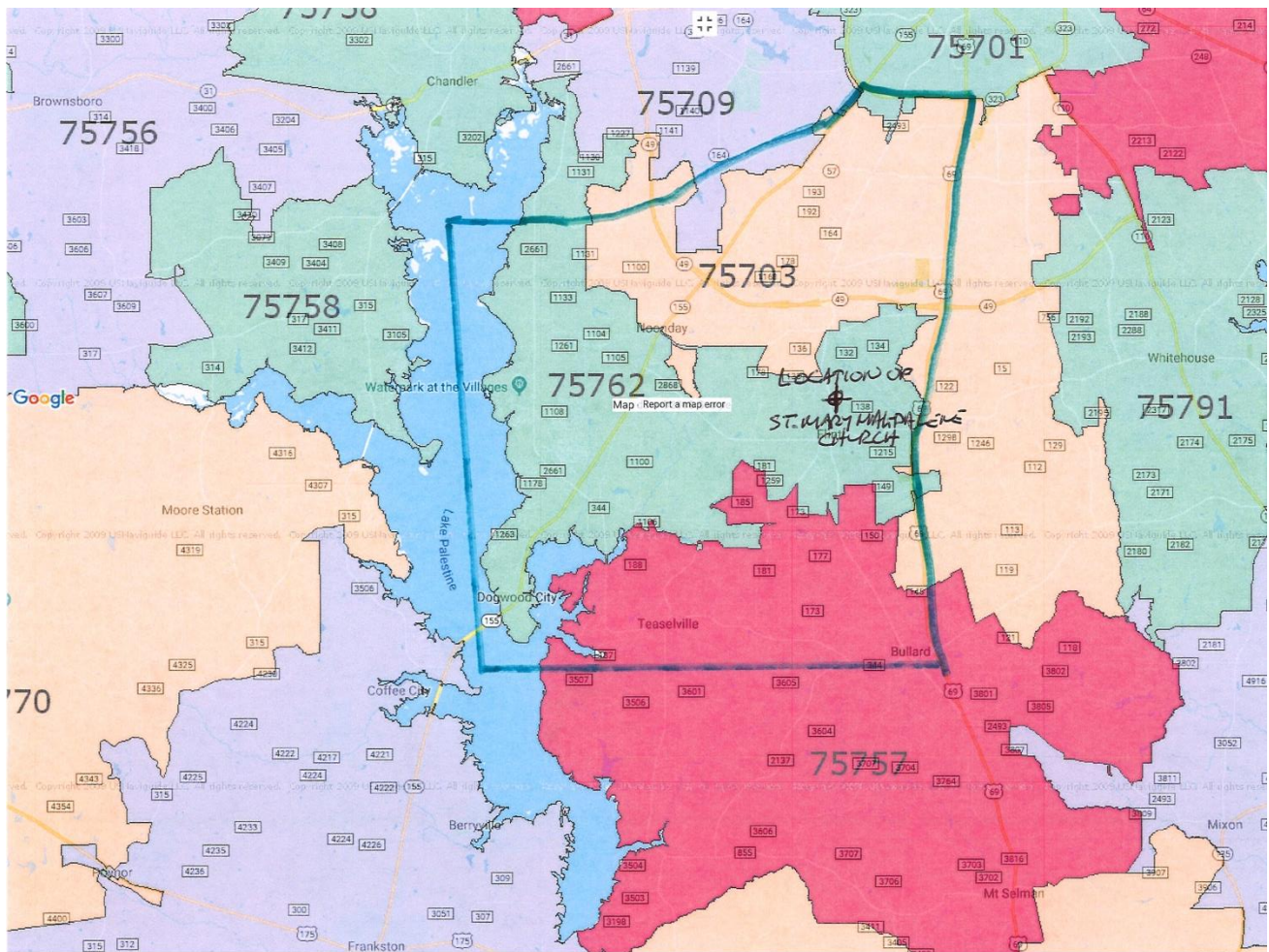


Figure 1: Parish and ZIP boundaries

Of the 25,864 people who have domicile within the boundaries of St. Mary Magdalene Parish, 12.2% are estimated to be Catholic.⁵ This indicates that the estimated number of Catholics within the parish boundaries is 3,155. However, parish census data indicates that there are only 451 households registered in the parish. Using the average number of persons per household (2.75) for Smith County,⁶ the parish has 1,240 registered parishioners which constitutes approximately one third of the overall estimated Catholic population.

From the earliest planning days for the first infrastructural expansion of St. Mary Magdalene a head count has been made of every person that comes to Mass. Using the head

³ <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/75703/>

⁴ <https://www.unitedstateszipcodes.org/75757/>

⁵ <http://www.city-data.com/county/religion/Smith-County-TX.html>

⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/smithcountytexas/HSD310216>

count for the 10 weekends between February 24 and May 5, 2018, (excluding the Easter weekend) the average attendance at any given weekend is 676. This, evenly spread over the 5 weekend Masses, is an average of 135. But Mass attendance is not evenly spread over all the Masses. As it happens, 54.4% of St. Mary Magdalene parishioners that attend Mass do so at the two Sunday morning Masses. From this it is possible to state that whatever size the new parish church will be, it needs to accommodate 54.4% of the average weekend Mass attendance as a new, larger church will not need to have five weekend Masses.

Time:	Day:	Language:	Average # attendance:	Average % attendance:
5:00pm	Saturday	English	131	19.3%
9:00am	Sunday	English	186	27.5%
11:30am	Sunday	English	182	26.9%
1:30pm	Sunday	Spanish	96	14.2%
5:00pm	Sunday	English	81	11.9%
Total average attendance at weekend Mass: 676				

Table 1: Mass schedule and attendance (10 week average, 2/24/18-5/5/18 excl. Easter)

Estimated population growth and impact on the parish:

The Texas State Demographer, Dr. Lloyd Potter, in a recent presentation titled “The Changing Population of Texas and the Tyler Region” indicated that the current population of Smith County will increase by 10-20% every 10 years to at least 2050.⁷ Using the median of the range (15%) of this estimated population growth, it can be estimated that the number of registered parishioners will grow from the current 1,240 to 2,169 by 2050. Assuming that the figure of 54.4% of St. Mary Magdalene Parish Mass goers remains constant, it is possible to estimate that 1,171 parishioners in 2050 will honor their Sunday obligation by participating in Mass. Also assuming that 54.4% of Mass goers will want to go Sunday morning, the proposed new church will need to accommodate 637 parishioners.

⁷ http://demographics.texas.gov/Resources/Presentations/OSD/2017/2017_03_21_TylerCatalyst100.pdf

Year:	# Registered members:	@ 54% average Mass attendance
2018	1,240	676
2020	1,426	770
2030	1,640	886
2040	1,886	1,018
2050	2,169	1,171

Table 2: Projected population growth in the parish

PART II – ST. MARY MAGDALENE CHURCH

Current seating capacity of St. Mary Magdalene Parish Church:

The seating capacity is determined according to the number of both pews and loose chairs that are available in the church. Currently there are 276 linear feet of pews. Allowing two feet per person means we can comfortably seat 138 parishioners. There are a further 74 loose chairs⁸ and space for 18 people on benches giving a total seating capacity of 230.

It is generally accepted that English speaking parishioners like space. When a church has reached 80% of its seating capacity, seats are hard to find and the church is regarded as “full,” albeit comfortably.⁹ Parishioners and other church goers will go elsewhere, if at all. The “80% capacity” of St. Mary Magdalene Parish Church is 184. The average Sunday 9:00am Mass attendance is 186, and the average Sunday 11:30am Mass attendance is 182. These Masses are regarded as “at comfortable capacity.”

Current and future Mass schedule:

Currently, there are five weekend Masses to assist parishioners to fulfill their Sunday obligation. These are Saturday at 5:00pm; and Sunday at 9:00am, 11:30am, 1:30pm, and 5:00pm. All Masses are celebrated by the pastor. Canon 905 states:

⁸ The parish has requested the consent of the Bishop to purchase “church chairs” as the quote for these chairs has come in at over \$10,000. They will replace the current dining hall chairs. The proposed chairs are oak, have a kneeler, a hymnal holder and interlock with each other to form a neat row. It is expected that these chairs will be used in the new church.

⁹ The 80% rule is a generally accepted rule of thumb. Further information may be found in the following resources: <https://alban.org/archive/the-80-percent-rule-fact-or-fiction/> , <https://gnichol.wordpress.com/2016/06/17/the-80-percent-rule-myth-or-fact/> , <https://www.espace.cool/2018/01/31/does-the-80-rule-still-apply/> , <http://ministryactionplans.com/church-growth-ratios/> . This is not an exhaustive listing.

§1. A priest is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist more than once a day except in cases where the law permits him to celebrate or concelebrate more than once on the same day.

§2. If there is a shortage of priests, the local ordinary can allow priests to celebrate twice a day for a just cause, or if pastoral necessity requires it, even three times on Sundays and holy days of obligation.

The current Mass schedule at St. Mary Magdalene Parish which has evolved from necessity is beyond the law as stated. A priest is “not permitted” to celebrate more than three Masses on Sunday, but neither is he forbidden from celebrating more than three. Celebrating more than three Masses on Sunday is far from ideal. The construction of a new parish church with a larger “comfortable capacity,” as has been discussed, will allow for a much reduced Mass schedule which can be augmented as the numbers participating in Mass grows.

Consequently, it is proposed to restructure the Mass schedule at St. Mary Magdalene Parish. This will result in a reduction in Mass times from 5 to 3. A possible Sunday schedule is as follows: Sunday at 9:30am (English) and 11:30am (Spanish) with an evening Mass either on Saturday or Sunday at 5:00pm.

PART III – PROPOSED NEW PARISH CHURCH

The project to date and the current financial disposition:

The project to build a new parish church for St. Mary Magdalene Parish has been an ongoing one for well over five years as evidenced by a visit from Bishop Strickland, then vicar general Bishop Carmody and diocesan finance officer Jim Smith in 2015 about the project. Plans were already well advanced and the meeting resulted in permission to run a three year capital campaign titled “Gate of Mercy” which will be completed in June 2018. The meeting had been initiated by Bishop Strickland to gain a “clear understanding of the present reality of St. Mary Magdalene”; to put in place a clear plan for how the proposed church will be paid for; and address the financial issues of “operating the parish with the new church on line.”¹⁰

The new parish church project was broken into two phases – enabling works which resulted in the creek being culverted and new parking being provided to compensate for the expected loss of parking during the church construction; and the new church itself. The budget of

¹⁰ Bishop Joseph E. Strickland, “Letter to Father Kelly,” February 6, 2015.

\$7,500,000 was established as a single budget for a single project, albeit broken out into two phases as mentioned. The goal for the “Gate of Mercy” capital campaign was \$4,000,000. This figure was decided on foot of a feasibility study by Walsh Associates who were contracted by the parish to conduct the capital campaign. As the overall budget for the project was estimated at \$7,500,000 the goal for the capital campaign was over 50% of this figure. The capital campaign received pledges totaling \$4,400,000.

The enabling works were completed October 2016 at a cost of \$1,130,000. It is at this point that anecdotal evidence suggests that the then CFO of the diocese, Laura Williams, clarified to the parish that the enabling works were one project and the new church is a separate project. The enabling works were paid for from the funds already pledged and collected.¹¹ Currently the parish holds \$2,638,210.94 in the building fund for a \$6,370,000 construction project (or 41%).

The new parish church project is at 100% architectural design phase and the architect has already been paid 90% of his fees for the entire project (\$439,000 of the \$580,000 design fee). At the time of Father Kelly’s transfer from the parish the WRL (the preferred contractor), the parish and the architect were engaged in a cost-cutting exercise to bring the project back into line with the budget of \$6,370,000. A year on and the construction costs have escalated on the back of hurricanes and floods. Building now is always cheaper than building next year.

The construction of a new parish church will also allow the parish to repurpose the current church as an activity space for youth ministry, food pantry, faith formation activities, and other parish functions. This new use for the current church building will only take place after the bishop has granted a decree reducing the church “to profane but not sordid use” (c. 1222 §2).

Architecture and style of the proposed church:

It is generally accepted that church architecture did not improve in the post-conciliar period. Many contemporary churches were conceived as mere envelopes in which the liturgy took place. The resulting functionalism, which has its origins in the reformation, has denigrated and removed the teaching potential of Catholic church architecture. The banal nature of church architecture from the last century is often attributed to the Second Vatican Council and changes

¹¹ Other expenses paid to date include the architect fees of \$439,000, Gate of Mercy expenses of \$53,657, chairs from Artesanos de Juan Bosco \$12,983, other items for the new church \$43,412, and \$20,296 on salaries.

to the tried and tested expressions of church architecture were attributed falsely as implementing the Council. Steven J. Schloeder puts it well:

In fact, it becomes clear from an integrated reading of Vatican II that the changes in external forms proposed by the Council were relatively few-always in the context of an organic growth from existing forms. The nature of the Church, of the Eucharist, and the liturgy of course remains constant even if (it) emphasizes change. Since the *Church* remains the same, one should question why *church buildings* have changed so radically since the Council. Vatican II did not change the substance of the faith of the liturgy but offered some fresh insights into both. Similarly, the buildings in which we worship and the expression of the liturgy itself should be open to responsible developments but should always reflect the Church's magisterial understanding of the Body of Christ in all its manifestations.¹²

Catholic church architecture is a vehicle for catechesis; it is more than a mere envelope. Even outside of the actual celebration of the liturgy a well-conceived, designed and executed Catholic church is a testimony of faith and purpose.¹³

Some comment has been made that the proposed church at St. Mary Magdalene is too ornate. By the standards of many it is, but it forms part of an overall architectural masterplan in which other buildings of a high architectural standard are already in existence. As the parish church is the center and focus of parish life, it ought to be obviously so. It ought to state that it is in this building the most important work of the Church takes place. This statement is not cheap but it is worth the price.

The plan of the proposed church for St. Magdalene Parish is rectangular with a sanctuary apse at the east end. The proposed style is reminiscent of the Romanesque. As one enters from the busyness of the secular world one can recollect oneself in the spacious narthex. Marc Prevot, the architect of the proposed church, insists that the narthex must comply with safety standards that state that 1/3 of the capacity of the building must be accommodated in the lobby of the building in times of emergency. Father Rowland, the pastor, has proposed that the narthex not be limited to this functionality but that it could also accommodate the baptistery and the liturgical space and fixtures necessary for weekday celebrations of the Mass.

Having shut out the secular world, one is able to proceed into the nave of the church. This is an unmistakably sacred space. The entire focus of the nave will be on the sacred, on the

¹² Steven J. Schloeder, *Architecture in Communion: Implementing the Second Vatican Council through liturgy and architecture*, (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1998), 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

sanctuary where the great mysteries of our faith are celebrated. As one journeys through the nave, from the secular to the sacred, one will arrive at the sanctuary of the church. The sanctuary limits will be defined by the apse, at the center of which will be the altar. Behind the altar will be the unmistakable reminder that the altar is an altar of sacrifice: the parish has acquired a very large and impressive carved wooden crucifix. To emphasize the central importance of the altar and the Eucharistic Sacrifice, there will be a reminder that the sacrifice of Christ took place on the hill of Calvary: the altar will be elevated above the nave by three steps and a *predella* or footspace guaranteeing the flexibility required to celebrate the Mass according to the Ordinary and Extraordinary Forms. Also behind the altar, and in front of the crucifix will be the tabernacle. On a lower level will be the other elements necessary for Mass; the ambo, the presider's chair, seating for servers and other ministers, and so on.

What is intended is that, even to the uninitiated the church is the most important building on the campus and that its sole purpose is sacred. Within the church it should be obvious to all that the most important part of the building is the sanctuary and within the sanctuary, the altar and what happens there is of the utmost importance.

Ongoing cost of operating a new church:

This is the last of three concerns listed by Bishop Strickland in his 2015 letter. The simplest way to calculate the estimated operating cost with reasonable accuracy is to take the average operating costs of the current complex at St. Mary Magdalene Parish¹⁴, estimate the portion that can be attributed to the current church¹⁵ and calculate the cost per cubic foot (ft³)¹⁶ thus allowing for a realistic estimate for the proposed church¹⁷. Using these factors it is estimated that electricity will cost \$22,723 per annum or \$1,893.50 per month; gas will cost \$1,979 per year or \$165.96 per month; and water will cost \$2,040 per year or \$170.01 per month.

St. Mary Magdalene Parish currently pays \$26,412 per year in property and liability insurance and it can be reasonably expected that these will increase. However, as the deadline for this report approached an estimate had not been received from Catholic Mutual and, due to the

¹⁴ Utilities for the current complex in 2017 were: Electricity \$17,833.70; gas \$1,446.00; water \$1,487.80.

¹⁵ The current parish complex is 332,359 ft³. The current church is 99,425 ft³ and is 30% of the volume of the overall complex.

¹⁶ The breakdown by volume is: Electricity \$0.05 per ft³; gas \$0.00435 per ft³; water \$0.0049 per ft³.

¹⁷ The proposed church is 454,452 ft³.

complicated nature of insurance, it is impossible for this author to speculate other than that this figure will most definitely rise. Nonetheless, the finance council of St. Mary Magdalene Parish are confident that the parish can comfortably finance the operation of the proposed church without compromising the pastoral mission of the parish.

PART IV – POSSIBLE FALLBACK POSITION

Parish Activity Center:

St. Mary Magdalene Parish has a need for an activity center. Additional space is needed for faith formation activities, dining and large social functions such as the annual Christmas dinner, weddings, funerals and quinceañeras. The same space needs to be utilitarian so that it can also be utilized for indoor recreation activities and for the parish food pantry and soup kitchen. It could also host larger Eucharistic celebrations in the parish such as Christmas Eve¹⁸, Ash Wednesday¹⁹, Easter Sunday²⁰, possibly some funerals²¹, and the conferral of the sacrament of Confirmation²². If the parish were to build an activity center it would also plan for the addition of three to six additional rooms suitable as smaller meeting spaces and which could provide a semi-permanent home for some of the parish's regular activities.

Such an activity center could be located on the proposed site of the new church. The new church could be located with the main door facing north on the east side of the current buildings. This orientation will allow for a more centralized circulation plan within the overall campus, coupled with “flipping” the current church orientation thus allowing Peaches Hall to act as a central entrance for all parish occasions.

¹⁸ Attendance at the 4:30pm Christmas Eve Mass in 2017 was 433. The overflow was accommodated in Peaches Hall with an audio and video link.

¹⁹ Attendance at the 6:00pm Ash Wednesday Mass in 2018 was 363. Additional chairs were brought into the church which compromised exits and exit routes.

²⁰ Easter Sunday Masses in 2018 began at 7:00am; attendance was 171. Mass at 9:00am was attended by 256 with a tandem Mass in Peaches Hall at 9:15am in which 111 people participated. The 11:30am Mass was attended by 356. Again, additional chairs were brought into the church, compromising exits and exit routes.

²¹ Anna Wegener, an 18 year old parishioner, daughter of two doctors, was killed in a car wreck and her funeral was May 17, 2018. 667 people attended the funeral Mass. The overflow was contained in Peaches Hall with video and audio link with others in the breezeway.

²² There were 38 candidates for confirmation in 2018. The parish asked that parishioners not directly associated with the candidates for confirmation to not attend. The expected number for 2019 will be higher and a second date for confirmation in 2019 has been requested from the Bishop's office.

The activity center would be approximately 72' x 120' (8,640sq.ft.) with an additional three meeting rooms of 25' x 25' (625sq.ft. each) giving rise to a building of approximately 10,515sq.ft. Construction costs for such a building vary between \$120 per square foot and \$200 per square foot, giving rise to an estimated cost of \$1.3-2 million.

How to fund the Activity Center:

In an ideal world St. Mary Magdalene Parish could simply redirect the funds in hand (\$2.6M) to this new endeavor. However, this is not an ideal world and to redirect the Gate of Mercy funds requires the written consent of the individual donors to change the intention of their gift. Preliminary and informal sounding of a number of donors has been negative.

It is possible that a separate capital campaign may be undertaken to raise funds for an activity center. The pastor of St. Mary Magdalene Parish, Rev. James Rowland, has indicated that he would find it morally impossible to conduct such a campaign when the purpose for the previous campaign has not been realized.

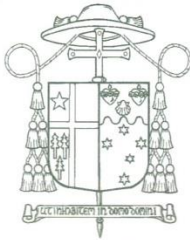
The Diocese of Tyler is currently conducting its "Priests for Tomorrow" capital campaign. The campaign goal for St. Mary Magdalene Parish has been set at \$750,000. If successful the parish will realize at least \$250,000 for its own purposes. This is a drop in the ocean towards the parish's needs and the five year period over which the campaign will run will preclude any other capital campaign for developing the parish infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

This brief study has endeavored to explain the rationale for the proposed 550 seat parish church for St. Mary Magdalene Parish. The rationale is rooted in grounded statistical data available on the internet. The author has picked the median of any ranges in his estimations. Included in this report is a description of the inadequate capacity of the current parish church that limits parish activities and growth. The report has described, in what the author believes to be a fair and balanced manner, the project to date and its financial status. The report also contains a rationale for the style of the proposed church and addresses the previously expressed concerns of Bishop Strickland.

There are a couple of points from the body of the report that bear emphasizing: a new church will result in a reduced Mass schedule reducing some of the pressures on the pastor, Father Rowland. The new church will make available other space for other parish events and purposes. Building costs never come down in price – construction is always more expensive next year. A joint campaign for both the new parish church and “Priests for Tomorrow” is, in the opinion of the author, the best way in which the Diocese of Tyler and St. Mary Magdalene Parish can achieve their mutual goals.

It is hoped that this report will prove instrumental in allowing the parish community of St. Mary Magdalene to continue with the development of contract drawings and construction of the new church. The author is thankful for the vigilance and oversight of Bishop Strickland in this project and appreciates the opportunity to demonstrate mastery of the history of the project, its complexity, and detail.



Office of the Bishop

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland, Bishop of Tyler

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Fáther Tim Kelly, STL
St. Mary Magdalene Catholic Church
10696 CR 1299
Flint, TX 75762

February 6, 2015

Dear Father Kelly,

I write to congratulate you and your parish community for the good work you have already done to move toward building a church. As you continue the efforts to raise the necessary funds and develop plans for the building I want to take the opportunity to engage with the community to ensure that we have the best plan possible in place.

I want to meet with you, members of your Pastoral Council and Finance Council and other parish leaders you may wish to include. I will ask Bishop Carmody and Jim Smith to attend the meeting as well so that we can benefit from their expertise and experience.

I would hope that this meeting can address the following issues.

1. Review of the current financial status of the parish along with good data on mass attendance and other aspects of parish life that can help us to have a clear understanding of the present reality of St. Mary Magdalene.
2. A report on fundraising efforts, building design and capacity and other issues pertinent to the project so that a clear plan for how the project will be paid for is in place.
3. Cost estimates for utilities, personnel and all other aspects of budgeting for the additional costs of not only constructing but operating the parish with the new church on line.

Please contact my assistant, Terri Bolton, so that she can assist you with getting this meeting on the calendar. An appropriate date for this meeting is likely to be at least a couple of weeks in the future but I would hope this can be time well spent in compiling the data outlined above and notifying the individuals you would like to include.

Thank you for your attention to my request and please be assured of my prayers.

Sincerely in Christ's Name,

Most Reverend Joseph E. Strickland
Bishop of Tyler

cc: Bishop Carmody – Vicar General
Jim Smith – CFO
Rose Brown