

Campaign assists parishes in need of expansion due to population growth

When the faithful of San Francisco Javier Parish joined together to build their church 78 years ago, they likely never dreamed of needing seating for more than 299 people.

The Austin parish and its mission, San Juan Diego, were founded to serve the Hispanic community south of the Colorado River. But due to recent urban expansion, they now have more than 2,000 families registered.

“For our 8 a.m. Mass on Sundays, we almost double capacity,” said Father Abraham Puentes Mejía, pastor. “For this reason, we celebrate two Masses at the same time in the church and in our parish hall.”



To accommodate all who attend 8 a.m. Mass on Sunday, San Francisco Javier Parish celebrates two Masses simultaneously in the church and parish hall.

And for celebrations like Confirmation and First Communion, participants are not only divided into groups, the Masses are held in the parish's open-air pavilion. This situation is not always desirable in extreme heat or cold.



San Francisco Javier Parish must celebrate special Masses, like First Communion and Confirmation, in the pavilion and divide participants into groups.

Given that the parish property cannot accommodate a larger church, eliminating the possibility of expanding the current worship space or building a new church on the site, a 25-acre lot has been purchased five miles to the southeast, according to Father Puentes Mejía.

San Francisco Javier raised 189 percent of its parish goal during Wave 2 of *Encountering Christ* and will direct the majority of its share of campaign funds toward the building of a church to seat more than a thousand worshippers. The parish will also benefit from the diocesan campaign element providing \$10 million to expand parishes along the Interstate 35 corridor so they may accommodate new membership and ministries.

“Recent population growth has stretched parishes in this area beyond their physical and ministerial capacities,” said Scott Whitaker, director of Stewardship and Development. “We know this is a reality we will continue to face for years to come, so a portion of campaign funds will also be set aside for the construction of new parishes in the future.”

He said that San Francisco Javier is one of four in the eastern ring of parishes in need of expansion due to an influx of people who have left East Austin and moved to this area. Only about 1,400 seats are available for the estimated 52,000 Catholics who have settled in this area, and the current parishes are not financially able to build the large worship spaces they now require.

The diocese is also taking the lead on the construction of the new churches for these expanding parishes. To be efficient with gifts to *Encountering Christ*, all four sanctuaries will be designed simultaneously, based on a prototype design that can be individualized.

Father Puentes Mejía said his parishioners were motivated to contribute to the campaign because of the need for a new church. “The poor give from their poverty but with generosity,” he said. “I feel a deep gratitude to the Diocese of Austin for thinking of our most needy communities and for helping us to have a new church in which more than a thousand people can be seated. In a future not too far away, that will be the number of people in each Mass.

“At the same time, I thank all those who have made their generous commitments,” he added.