

St. Francis of Assisi Church

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What We Heard from You

A Report to the Parish on the Parish Center Feasibility Study –

St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church • Aviston, Illinois • Presented September 3, 2026

For more than fifteen years, this parish has talked about building a new Parish Center on the site of our former school. This past summer, we asked you directly what you thought about it.

Working with the Institute for School and Parish Development (ISPD), we listened in four different ways. We held eleven listening sessions — with the Knights of Columbus, the Servants of St. Francis and Catholic Fraternal Life, the Quilters and Altar Sodality, our Parish School of Religion (PSR), Vacation Bible School (VBS), and Catholic Youth Ministry (CYM) leaders, the Pastoral Council, Bible study groups, and open sessions after all three weekend Masses. We surveyed the parish in the pews and online. We sat down for sixty-two personal conversations. And we offered an online questionnaire for those who preferred to write.

Hundreds of Parishioners took part. Here is honestly what we were told:

Parishioners want this to happen — and are tired of waiting. The tone was warm and supportive nearly everywhere we went. You affirmed the need for a real, accessible place to gather. Many of you said, in one form or another, that fifteen years of studying is long enough. You also spoke well of your parish leaders, describing them as transparent, trustworthy, and level-headed. That trust is something we don't take lightly.

Transparency mattered more to you than anything else. This was named more often than any other single quality in the entire study. In every one of the eleven sessions, someone said some version of the same thing: *"Be open with everything. No surprises."* You want regular reporting on what's been pledged, what's been received, and what's been spent. Several of you specifically suggested monthly updates. You weren't being suspicious — you were telling us the condition under which you'd be glad to invest.

You want to see it before you're asked to fund it. The most repeated request across the whole study was straightforward: show us a rendering, a floor plan, exactly where it will sit, and a cost we can trust. Several of you asked pointedly whether tearing down the old

school and any needed cleanup are inside that number or on top of it. That's a fair question, and it deserves a plain answer before anyone is asked for anything.

You asked us to preserve the parish's debt-free position and to move forward prudently as campaign gifts are received. We share that goal: when all campaign pledges have been fulfilled, the project should be fully paid for. Parishioners also encouraged us to consider a phased approach. We believe the spirit of this feedback was that, for example, if we did not have a path to raise sufficient funds to achieve our building vision, we should build Phase 1 first and come back later to Phase 2 when sufficient funds are available to achieve the entire project vision. The final financing approach will be developed with the design, construction schedule, campaign results, and diocesan approval in view. Because no design has been completed, we do not yet know whether a phased approach would involve separate construction phases, completing some interior areas later, or sequencing demolition and construction while continuing toward the full project. The design team will evaluate those options based on cost, usability, timing, and the risk that stopping and restarting construction could increase the total cost. Our aim is not to wait until every pledge is collected before beginning, but to proceed responsibly toward completing the project as funding and approvals allow. If limited short-term borrowing is needed to maintain an efficient construction schedule or avoid higher costs caused by delay, it would be considered carefully, with diocesan approval, and communicated transparently.

You want it right-sized and genuinely useful. You asked for a quality, single-level, fully accessible building that fits our campus and serves the parish throughout the year—not one sized primarily for the parish picnic. A new Parish Center could provide flexible, dependable space for faith formation and parish life, including Bible study, Sunday School, Catholic Youth Ministry, Vacation Bible School, faith leadership meetings, Altar Sodality, quilting, and parish and family gatherings. The design should reflect the actual needs of these programs, the groups that have reserved the current Parish Center, and other ministries the parish could better support in the future.

You asked us to think about the young families. We have 206 children in PSR this year which is a strong level of participation. Many of you named engaging those families as a great opportunity. A Parish Center that doesn't serve them isn't worth building.

And you had questions. Some of you wanted assurance that money raised here stays here, with this parish's project. Some asked how this would sit alongside the Mater Dei effort. Some asked whether bidding for design and construction would be open and competitive. Several people we interviewed held back from giving an opinion at all until they could see a design and a price.

We want to say clearly: **not one of these was an objection to the Parish Center.** Every one of them is a question we can answer — and answering them is our job, not yours.

What we're asking of you. When the time comes, we'll invite three gifts, and not everyone will offer all three in the same measure: the gift of prayer, the gift of involvement, and the gift of financial participation. Forty-five of you already volunteered to help during the survey itself. That says a great deal about this parish.

The building matters because of what happens inside it: faith formation, youth and adult ministries, quilting, parish gatherings, the picnic, and the ordinary weekday evenings when parish life is at its best. These are among the ministries and activities parishioners value most, and they are the kinds of gatherings a new Parish Center would help sustain and strengthen.

Please always feel free to share any questions or feedback.

Yours in Christ

The Parish Center Executive Committee:

Fr. Von Deeke, Milissa Faust, April Foutch, Amber Griesbaum, Daniel Mondt, & David Weis

Facts and Figures:

1. Listening sessions (11 sessions, ~75 input sheets)

Tone was warm and supportive: leadership described as transparent, trustworthy, and level-headed; clear affirmation that the parish needs a functional, accessible center; and a strong desire *not* to stall again after fifteen years of study. The one theme voiced in **every** session: "Be open with everything, no surprises." ISPD's read — the parish is engaged, proud, ready, prudent, and willing to invest.

2. Parish-wide survey (306 responses: 261 in-pew, 45 online)

- **77.4% willing to invest** (223 of 288 who answered the question) — the single most consequential finding.
- **7.8/10** average rating for building the Center; **7.3/10** for launching a campaign.
- **45 volunteers** stepped forward, most with full contact details.
- Willingness to invest climbed across the weekend: 4:00 p.m. Mass 72.0% → 7:30 a.m. 79.8% → 9:30 a.m. 83.8%; the online survey was lowest at 63.4%.

3. Interviews & questionnaires (62 + 25 = 87 leadership/financial-base respondents)

- **94%** rate the parish outstanding or above average (79 of 84; none below average) — above ISPD's 80% norm.
- **94%** very favorable or favorable toward a campaign (67 of 71) — also above norm.
- **68%** indicated willingness to make a gift (42 of 62 interviewees; 71% of questionnaire respondents).
- Most-admired ministries — Sunday School, VBS, CYM, the pastor's pastoral care, the picnic, Quilters, Altar Sodality — are precisely the ones that would use the building, so the case for the Center writes itself through them.
- **14 of 62 interviewees withheld a rating** pending more information. They completed the rest of the interview and mostly spoke favorably; ISPD classifies them as persuadable, not opposed — and their hesitation maps almost entirely to one request: show the design and the cost.

4. Indicated giving capacity — \$1,161,250 from 73 respondents

The study recorded approximately \$1.16 million in indicated giving interest from 73 respondents. These are not signed pledges, and we should never present them as guaranteed funds. They are evidence of potential capacity. The figures were also valued conservatively within the ranges provided. The responsible conclusion is that meaningful leadership support appears to exist, but it must still be cultivated and formally documented.

GIFT RANGE	RESPONDENTS	VALUE APPLIED	INDICATED TOTAL
\$100,000 – \$250,000	2	\$137,500	\$275,000
Gifts confirmed at \$100,000	2	\$100,000	\$200,000
\$50,000 – \$100,000	1	\$62,500	\$62,500
\$25,000 – \$50,000	5	\$30,000	\$150,000
\$10,000 – \$25,000	15 + 4	\$15,000	\$285,000
\$5,000 – \$10,000	14 + 7	\$6,250	\$131,250
Under \$5,000	11 + 12	\$2,500	\$57,500
TOTAL INDICATED	73		\$1,161,250

- ✓ The Indicated Total is Valued **conservatively at the 25% point of each range**
- ✓ Critically, these are indications of interest in financially supporting the project, not signed pledges and they were recorded *before* the broader parish was invited.

5. Financial and demographic context

- 770 registered families (up from 715 in 2020);
- Participation: only **334 of 770** families appear in giving records; 157 give \$1,000+ annually; 48 give \$2,500+. That gap is framed as re-engagement opportunity, not a ceiling.
- Funds: \$337,271 designated to the Parish Center; \$367,814 in the Improvement Fund; \$438,338 in the General Fund; \$699,241 in memorial gifts 2021–2025; **no planned gifts recorded** — a clear opening.
- **\$0 debt**; budget balanced "sometimes" since 2023.
- Track record: 2025 picnic netted \$91,568 (up 48% in five years); largest single gift ever was \$360,000; \$101,000 already given toward the Center; the 2011 campaign pledged \$517,166 on 319 cards.
- Area median household income \$117,622 vs. Clinton County's \$84,960; Aviston has grown every census period since 1990.

What the results add up to:

The gift-range model assembles **\$2.5M–\$2.8M from 700+ donors over 3–5 years**: a Pacesetter (silent) phase carrying ~\$2,075,000 (roughly 75% of goal) through four leadership divisions, then a public phase of \$675,000 across parish, friends, business, and new-parishioner divisions. Added to the \$337,271 on deposit, that enables a potential total project cost of **~\$2.84M–\$3.14M — debt free**.

Honest caveats stated: The ultimate feasibility of this project is *conditional* on diocesan approval, a real rendering and defensible costs before public announcement, competitive bidding, sustained transparency, 100% leadership backing, trained volunteers, rigorous pledge follow-up, generosity of our parishioners, and genuine engagement of younger families.