



Feasibility Study Report  
for  
The Episcopal Diocese  
of West Tennessee  
June 25, 2009

Executive Summary

**Background:**

In May of 2008, Bishop Johnson announced a Listening Campaign to gather input to proposals for the future of the Diocese. Over the summer, representatives from The Episcopal Church Foundation held preliminary meetings with rectors throughout the Diocese to discuss individual parish plans and to assure collaboration on both sides. In the fall of 2008 the Diocese began an educational program of parish visits and leadership meetings to assess the degree of interest in the proposed goals. Although this program was severely hampered by anxiety surrounding the economic crisis, by spring of 2009 some receptions with key leaders were possible and the proposed goals were highlighted at Diocesan Convention.

In order to assess the effectiveness of communications to date, the Diocese proceeded with a formal feasibility study in May of 2009. The study was conducted in three phases: research, personal interviews, and direct mail. Direct mail surveys were sent May 14th with a response deadline of May 31<sup>st</sup>. Personal interviews were conducted May 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> by Terri Mathes and Maurice Seaton.

**STATISTICAL NOTES:**

- ◆ A total of 999 direct mail questionnaires were mailed to the diocesan community. Of those, 239 were returned: a mail response rate of 24%.
- ◆ A total of 944 lay leaders were contacted either by personal interview or direct mail. Of those, 258 or 27% participated.
- ◆ A total of 29 rectors or vicars of parishes in the Diocese and assistant or associate rectors of parishes in the Diocese were contacted either by personal interview or direct mail. Of those, 18 or 62% participated.
- ◆ A total of 26 vocational deacons in the Diocese, non-parochial clergy and retired clergy were contacted either by personal interview or direct mail. Of those, 8 or 31% participated.
- ◆ Including the 45 who were interviewed, 1044 units were exposed to the study. Of those, a total of 284 units or 27% participated.
- ◆ Based on experience, this response rate is a good representative involvement from the diocesan community, lending credibility to the study findings.

## Composite Analysis and Summary of All Responses Total of 284 Responses

*Note: Not all respondents answered all questions.*

Please check **one blank** that best defines your current affiliation:

258 Lay

15 Rector or Vicar of a parish in the Diocese

3 Assistant or Associate Rector of a parish in the Diocese

3 Vocational Deacon in the Diocese

2 Non-Parochial Clergy

3 Retired Clergy

**1. Prior to this survey, were you aware that the Diocese was considering a capital campaign?**

167 Yes      111 No

Sixty percent were aware that the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee is considering a capital campaign.\* While this is encouraging, this percentage indicates that much more energy must be invested in communication. Remember, the persons responding are the most knowledgeable about diocesan issues. All of the clergy responding were aware.

\* Only 56% of the laity were aware.

**2. Prior to this survey, were you aware of the needs as expressed in the accompanying proposed plans?**

82 Aware      66 Not Aware      129 Aware of some of the needs

Thirty percent of the respondents were aware of the needs of the Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee. Another 47% were aware of some of the needs. Another 24% were not aware of the needs. Again, this is an indication that much work remains to be done to tell the story and invite involvement.

**3. Generally speaking, do you favor the Diocese conducting a capital campaign as outlined in the proposed plans?**

73 Yes                      58 No                      137 Yes, but with some concerns

Twenty-seven percent are in favor of the campaign, with another 51% in favor with some concerns. Another 22% are opposed to the campaign. This is a sign that the diocesan community is willing to support a campaign but concerns, especially timing and the ambitiousness of the proposed campaign must be addressed by leadership.

**4. Please indicate the level of priority you would attach to each of the projects outlined in the proposed plans by checking the appropriate line under each heading. At present, they are listed in no particular order.**

*\*Select only one option per line and feel free to make comments (use an extra sheet if necessary).*

	PRIORITY				Lack Information
	High	Medium	Low	Opposed	
a. St. Columba Conference Center Improvements	<u>125</u>	<u>92</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>12</u>
b. Campus Ministry	<u>63</u>	<u>136</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>13</u>
c. Seminarian Support	<u>102</u>	<u>108</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>11</u>
d. Congregational Growth & Development	<u>127</u>	<u>79</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>15</u>

In determining which parts of the proposed case are most attractive to respondents, the following system is used:

High Priority = 3 points; Medium Priority = 2 points; Low Priority = 1 point;  
Opposed to Project = -1 point; Lack Information = 0 points

The most popular receives the highest number of points. For example:

**St. Columba Conference Center Improvements**

375 High Priority                      184 Medium Priority                      29 Low Priority  
0 Lack Information                      -13 Opposed to Project

Total Points: **575**

**RANKING BY POINTS:**

St. Columba Conference Center Improvements	575
Congregational Growth & Development	570
Seminarian Support	556
Campus Ministry	495

These rankings do not dictate those projects the Diocese should embrace in the final case statement, but they are a strong indication of what communication and marketing must occur if leadership does elect to support projects that have a lower acceptance rating.

**8. How would you describe the present economic climate in your community?**

  1   Excellent        37   Good       156  Fair        88  Poor

Fifty-five percent of the respondents to this question believe it is fair. Another 31% consider it poor. Thirteen percent believe it to be good, and one respondent rated it as excellent.

**9. Is the present economic climate improving, remaining the same, or declining?**

  48  Improving       123  Remaining the Same       103  Declining

Indications are that the local economy is remaining the same, with 45% rating it as such. Another 38% believe it is declining. The remaining 18% believe it is improving. These responses express economic pessimism. When people feel the economy is good, they are more apt to make gifts. Responses to Questions 8 and 9 suggest a diminished goal due to economic considerations.

**12. If we embark on a capital campaign, the entire Diocese would be asked to participate in 2009 and 2010. Do you think this proposed timing is appropriate?**

  43  Yes       167  No        55  No strong feeling one way or the other

Only 16% of respondents are in favor of the proposed timing. The majority, 63%, were opposed to the campaign timing. Another 21% had no strong feeling one way or the other. This is an indication that the economy needs to improve prior to an official launch of a campaign. This is not to say that work cannot continue in communication and the campaign enter a quiet phase for major gifts earlier than parish involvement.

**13. If you are a rector, vicar, or senior warden of a parish, would your congregation join in gathering gifts for this Diocesan effort?**

  17  Yes        7  No        22  Probably, but need to discuss with leadership

Of those that responded, 37% would be willing to join in gathering gifts. Another 48%

indicated an interest, but need to discuss with leadership. However, 76% of responding rectors or vicars expressed a willingness to participate in a diocesan campaign, although 17% of those had not yet consulted their leadership. This response suggests the need to closely evaluate the potential involvement of each parish and to work with rectors and vicars to educate lay leadership about the goals and benefits of a potential campaign. Obviously, working closely and graciously with each church is required in a diocesan campaign.

**14. If convinced of the need, would you personally be willing to contribute to this proposed campaign? (All gifts, regardless of size, are needed and are important to the success of the proposed campaign.)**

157 Yes    38 No    82 Not sure at this time

Fifty-seven percent would be willing at this early date to personally contribute to the campaign, while another 29% expressed that they are not sure at this time. Only 14% indicated a negative response. This is a positive trend and an indication that a campaign can proceed. While we like to see parish responses higher, this is a normal percentage of willingness to give for a diocesan effort.

**15. If "yes," please estimate your possible total range of giving. Gifts potentially could be paid over a several-year period. *This is not a pledge or in any way binding.***

<u>42</u> \$500 or less	<u>24</u> \$500 to \$1,000
<u>42</u> \$1,000 to \$3,000	<u>13</u> \$3,000 to \$5,000
<u>14</u> \$5,000 to \$10,000	<u>8</u> \$10,000 to \$25,000
<u>5</u> \$25,000 to \$50,000	<u>2</u> \$50,000 to \$100,000
<u>0</u> \$100,000 to \$250,000	<u>0</u> \$250,000 to \$500,000
<u>0</u> \$500,000 to \$1,000,000	<u>0</u> \$1,000,000 to \$2,500,000
<u>0</u> \$2,500,000 and above	

**Typical Gifts Essential to the Success  
of a \$12,200,000 Capital Campaign**

Size of Gift	# Needed	Gifts Indicated in Study*
\$2,500,000	1	0
\$1,000,000	1	0
\$500,000	5	0
\$250,000	5	0
\$100,000	10	2
\$50,000	30	5
\$25,000	35	8
\$10,000	60	14
\$5,000	80	13
\$3,000	125	42
\$1,000	200	24
\$500 and below	Many	42

\*Using the high range estimate

Respondents projected donations ranging from a low of approximately \$642,000 to a high of \$1,026,000. (While not indicated in the chart above, not all gift amounts were given within a range as presented. Some were given as singular amounts, e.g., \$5,000, instead of \$3,000 to \$5,000. The high and low estimates have been adjusted accordingly.) These early estimates fall short of supporting \$12.2 million as a primary goal, unless more leadership gifts are discovered in a 'quiet phase' prior to an official launch.

**17. If asked, would you be willing to work on a committee in support of the proposed capital campaign, such as hosting an event, helping with communication, or recruiting workers?**

45 Yes    106 No    113 Not sure at this time

Seventeen percent would be willing at this early date to volunteer. Another 43% are not sure at this time and may be persuaded to participate as the campaign plans are formulated. This is a fair response at this stage in the process. With additional communication about the proposed campaign, it is likely that an adequate number of workers would be attracted to this effort.

**20. In your opinion, what major positive factors does the Diocese have in its favor for the proposed campaign?**

Comments were many and varied. Some highlights include:

- a. The Bishop
- b. The potential for St. Columba
- c. Commitment to the Diocese

## **21. What problems, if any, do you foresee for this project?**

Comments were many and varied. Some highlights include:

- a. The economy
- b. The timing
- c. Competition with other parish capital campaigns

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Awareness of Need**

A majority of respondents (60%) were aware that The Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee is considering a possible campaign, and 78% were also aware of some or all of the proposed plans. Of course, not all the items received the same degree of support. Present awareness of need is a positive; however, each project should be studied and prioritized with consideration given to the degree of support and the resources available. As the official launch of the campaign may be delayed until improvement in the economy, energies must be invested in increasing awareness of need and ministry opportunities.

### **Interest in and Support for a Drive**

There is significant indication of support for the proposed campaign, but also signs that suggest caution. Positive signs from respondents include:

1. Seventy-eight percent of all respondents are in favor of the campaign, although some with reservations.
2. Fifty-seven percent of all respondents would personally give to the campaign.
3. Thirty-seven percent of all respondents indicated that their congregation would join in gathering gifts for this effort. Another 48% would probably join in, but need to discuss with leadership.
4. Eighty-two percent of responding rectors and vicars support the campaign, although 41% have some concerns.
5. Seven parishes considering campaigns in the near future expressed a willingness at this time to work collaboratively with a diocesan effort.

## Concerns

1. While a number of major gifts were identified, too few were reported at this early date to allow a goal of \$12.2 million to be considered.
2. Sixty-three percent of all respondents are opposed to the proposed campaign timing.
3. Forty-three percent of lay respondents were unaware of a potential campaign and another 50% were only partially aware of the goals. Lay leadership is crucial to carrying the story of the Diocese into individual parishes.
4. Only 17% of all respondents are willing at this early stage to consider a volunteer position.
5. Eighteen percent of rectors and vicars oppose a campaign and at least two parishes are either unable or unwilling to participate in a diocesan effort at this time.

## Influential Leadership

Strong lay leadership—both financial and volunteer—is absolutely essential for the success of any campaign. A leadership core has been identified but needs further development. The Bishop is a key player in recruiting these individuals. It will be the challenge of this leadership group to expand involvement throughout the diocese over the next several months, including other individuals who may have significant giving potential.

Strong clergy support is critical. Only three of the rectors or vicars oppose the campaign. Fourteen support the campaign, although half of those expressed concerns. Those concerns are: 1) parish campaigns take precedence, 2) a poor economy and the effect the economy has on a parish's ability to meet its annual budget obligations and 3) the case statement needs greater articulation, particularly the St. Columba business plan and the standards for a revolving fund.

The Bishop must be the leader in such a campaign and must set aside significant blocks of time for this effort to achieve maximum success. The more calls the Bishop can make and the more church events he can attend, the more resources will be given.

## Gift Potential at this date

Experience tells us we can take the average between the low estimate (\$642,000) and the high estimate (\$1,026,000) of the pre-campaign projections revealed in the Study and multiply by a factor of 2 when certain percentages and comments (such as revealed in

this study) are attained. Thus the average, \$834,000, when multiplied by this factor (2) reveals at this time a suggested goal of \$1,700,000. This recommendation is made factoring in the reality that additional gifts and parish participation not yet identified, will be forthcoming; hence the multiple of 2.

If further time can be invested in major donor identification and sharing of the vision, this number could move significantly upward, especially as the economy improves.

### **Planned Giving**

A number of people requested planned giving information, and nine indicated the church was already in their estate plans. This is encouraging and suggests that such future gifts could be used to help build endowment or retire indebtedness.

### **Campaign Timing**

A significant number (63%) of respondents expressed concern about the proposed timing of the campaign. A majority of the comments in this section reflected concern about the economy. Others expressed the need for more specific information about the proposed goals.

## **Recommendations**

### **Recommendation #1**

The information revealed in this Study suggests that a capital campaign for a Primary Goal of \$1,700,000 is realistic and appropriate at this time. Given donor reluctance on account of the economy and the expressed needs of donors for more information, we believe this goal could easily be surpassed with an attentive and well organized response to donors' questions and concerns while working through the economic situation. This will require substantial time from the Bishop and Diocesan staff. The strategy also presupposes an assertive campaign will eventually involve the entire constituency, including parish participation, employing the methodology proposed by the Episcopal Church Foundation.

### **Recommendation #2**

Much work remains before formally beginning the campaign. We recommend using this period of economic uncertainty to a) finalize a clear and compelling business plan for St. Columba b) draw up proposed guidelines for the revolving fund and c) share these plans with key potential major donor prospects who have expressed interest. During this process, key lay volunteers should be recruited to hold leadership positions. We recommend strong, proactive use of co-chair positions so that experienced leaders can

mentor the next generation of philanthropic leadership. During the fall of 2009, the following next steps should occur:

1. Develop a strategy and calendar of activities for the Bishop in the next phase of this effort.
2. Use the Diocesan picnic in September to highlight St. Columba's role in the diocese and its benefit to parishes.
3. Finalize and approve revolving fund guidelines.
4. Complete a St. Columba business plan and have it approved by the STC board.
5. Implement a new and dynamic marketing plan for St. Columba.
6. Begin sharing guidelines and business plan with interested potential donors.
7. Implement a donor tracking system
8. Begin leadership recruiting discussions
9. Continue dialogue with vestries and parish leaders concerning parish needs and timing issues, specifically obtaining feedback during the Bishop's visitations and other opportunities for dialogue.
10. Continue to identify and involve philanthropic leaders.
11. Execute a comprehensive communications strategy.

### **Recommendation #3**

In January 2010, review donor tracking system to evaluate level of potential major donor investment. Evaluate current impact of the economy. Consult with leadership to determine future options. Those options could include:

- a. Proceeding with a capital campaign for the highest priorities identified by the Study. While some type of St. Columba expansion is envisioned, if such is not possible, a modified capital drive for congregational development and seminarian support may be possible and should be considered a serious option.
- b. Support and manage parish co-campaigns, as and when these arrive, while continuing to work with major donor prospects. A portion of parish co-campaigns would be dedicated to diocesan capital goals.
- c. If a diocesan capital drive is not possible, proceed with an enhanced annual giving program that targets attainable aspects of the original set of goals, such as seminarian support and congregational development, which would raise the financial capacity of the Diocese as a whole.

**Recommendation #4**

Once a decision has been made, share the revised plans as soon as possible and seek increased consensus. Increase significantly all publicity concerning this project including an executive summary of this study and next steps, whatever they might be, to be undertaken by diocesan leadership.

**Recommendation #5**

Planned giving activities should be pursued throughout this process in an effort to encourage major gifts to underwrite the future of the church and the goals of this proposed campaign. Such gifts, often deferred and received in future years, are helpful in reducing mortgages or building endowments. The Episcopal Church Foundation is responding to individual requests for information on planned giving and welcomes the opportunity of working with any planned giving volunteers at both the parish and diocesan level.

**Recommendation #6**

Select professional management to guide and direct the next steps to insure efficiency and the implementation of a proven, successful fundraising methodology. A separate proposal for service from the Episcopal Church Foundation is available for your consideration.

**A Final Word**

The Episcopal Church Foundation thanks the leadership of The Episcopal Diocese of West Tennessee for the opportunity to work with the diocesan community. We enjoyed our work on your behalf and would welcome the opportunity to be of service.

Thank you, and best wishes.

