

St. Joseph Catholic Church
15710 LA Highway 16
French Settlement, LA 70733
(225) 698-3110

A Faith Community Since 1839

April 3, 2019

Dear Members of the Building Review Board:

I write to you today to introduce our plans to build a new rectory in French Settlement. The last time a priest did this in French Settlement was 1959, when the current office and rectory building was constructed with the permission of the archbishop of New Orleans. The St. Joseph rectory has served its purpose for sixty years, and it will continue to serve the church parish as an “office only” in the future. However, it is time for a new rectory. It is time to have certain basic perks such as a garage door, a place to entertain guests (a living room), a porch, and a fully accessible bedroom/bathroom/closet suite. None of these are part of the current rectory. In fact, all of the living quarters are upstairs, but the kitchen, dining room, and utility room are downstairs. Any priest, seminarian, or approved guest has to pass through the church office to use these spaces. The time it takes to walk from my office desk to my bedroom is twelve seconds. I hear the office phone ringing all day and sometimes, all night long. Needless to say, *I feel that I never leave work.*

I have served the communities of St. Joseph and St. Stephen for ten years. I have tackled many renovation projects during this time, and I placed this project last, so that no one would ever accuse me of wanting to live in luxury. St. Joseph Parish has paid off the new church construction (from 2005-2006), we have worked to complete aspects of the new church that were originally put off due to cost, we have revitalized our historic closed church (dating to 1889), refreshed our PSR classrooms with new flooring and furniture, and in the last two months, we have renovated Fr. Kinkead Parish Hall. So, it is time to turn our attention to a new rectory.

The new rectory will be *large*—there is no other way to describe it. In the past, we (the diocesan church) built large rectories with lots of bedrooms. I think about my days growing up in Plaquemine, where the St. Clement rectory had five bedrooms! But they were very small bedrooms, except for the pastor’s suite. The proposed rectory for French Settlement has **three bedrooms** that are all self-contained suites. One of those suites is downstairs and fully accessible. The floor plan looks different from most residential floor plans today—and I wanted it that way. This building is not designed to house a family. It is designed to house three celibate men who want their own privacy and the ability to choose when to be sociable with the other residents of the house. The bedrooms are deliberately large, so that if a priest/seminarian/guest wishes to entertain company downstairs, the other residents can stay in their room and not feel claustrophobic or imprisoned. Each suite has a bedroom big enough for a sizable bed, a recliner, television, desk or worktable, bookshelf, and a small refrigerator with windows looking outside towards the new church and a beautiful, centuries-old oak tree, or the field next door, or the woods. Each suite has its own bathroom and a walk-in closet with generous space for the possessions that diocesan priests carry from assignment to assignment. There is no need to go across the hall for the bathroom. It’s all self-contained in each suite.

The current rectory has an open carport that everyone can view from Highway 16. Any priest assigned here would feel like they live in a fishbowl. The future rectory has a generous two-vehicle garage that opens away from Highway 444. My friend Fr. Randy Cuevas can park his Suburban in the garage... it is long enough for a bigger vehicle! The location of the new rectory ensures good privacy for the priest, and a healthy distance from the office. It will sit towards the back of our current property, with two neighboring houses about 100 feet away from the left side of the house (northwest side). There is a creek and a wooded area about 100 feet behind the rectory on the north side (our undeveloped property). There is an empty field on the east side. A beautiful oak tree will be about 100 feet away from the front porch on the south side. It will make the rectory look very picturesque when viewed from the new church parking lot--the oak tree will frame the left side of the front porch with the moss draping down from the limbs. The lovely entry hall and stairway down the

center of the house will give an antebellum and welcoming feel, while maximizing privacy inside the house, providing space between kitchen, dining room, and living room. Once again—it is built for three independent people—not a family.

We have moved in 50 loads of clay to place the bottom of the house foundation two feet above the base flood elevation. We have a few more loads of clay to bring in, which will place us high and dry from any future flooding. We have the luxury of knowing where the water stopped in French Settlement during the Great Flood of 2016. The church property already sits high and dry, but we wanted to raise the rectory even higher. The thresholds of the doors will be three feet above the basic flood elevation when done.

Mr. Daryl May, a noted residential contractor from Baton Rouge, has agreed to build the house for cost (without charging a contractor fee). He is also asking some of his friends in the construction business to donate pieces and parts of the rectory, since it is being built for a non-profit. There are certain parts of the construction labor that I will do as well, such as interior painting and floor installation on the main level. Doors and windows will be purchased at cost, thanks to Mr. Lester Sylvester from Gonzales who will order them for us through his construction business. Mr. Bill Stegall will donate a Mo-dad septic tank system for the project.

Even with these donations, we anticipate that the new rectory will cost approximately \$330,000. Thankfully, we already own the land, so we don't have to worry about purchasing that. The clay for the house pad came to us at a minimal cost of \$2,050 for 800 cubic yards. To cover the cost of construction, St. Joseph Church has \$228,000 in a diocesan building fund, as well as \$55,000 of dedicated funds in our Regions checking accounts (regular and fundraising). The parish began a \$300,000 capital campaign in January 2019 for the new rectory, as well as the bell tower that was originally designed for the new church, and a small cemetery chapel in Head of Island. The proceeds from our upcoming \$10,000 raffle in May, as well as our July 4th fundraiser, will net an additional \$30,000 for the rectory project. We believe that all of these sources, when combined, will pay for the new rectory without long term debt. If necessary, a short-term loan from the Diocese of Baton Rouge might be requested if the project goes over-budget.

I am asking Mr. Glenn Landry to forward this information electronically to you because of my personal desire to fast track this project to completion. My mother was recently diagnosed with congestive heart failure and at some point in the future, it may be necessary that she moves here with me, as I am the only child. The current St. Joseph rectory is not feasible for this task. Thankfully, the St. Stephen rectory is available, but it is twenty minutes further from emergency care, and that rectory was built in the early 1960's before modern accessibility requirements, as well.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Feel free to contact me if you have any further questions... (225) 205-4757.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Very Rev. Jason Palermo, Pastor
St. Joseph & St. Stephen Parishes