

FR. JASON'S WISHFUL THINKING...

"WELCOME, FOOLISH MORTALS"

THE ST. JOSEPH CEMETERY EXPANSION, EXPLAINED

My announcement last weekend about our potential cemetery expansion was the source of many calls to the parish office, and even some visits to the cemetery with parishioners as I tried to map out what property is included in the potential acquisition and what is not. So I am taking the opportunity to explain everything in the bulletin; and what steps you need to take if you are interested in purchasing cemetery plots.

In late September 2017, Mr. Kenny Guitreau and Mr. Ronnie Small came to the parish office to see me, unexpectedly. They announced that the Guitreau family was ready to sell the property which adjoins the church property on the east side. Kenny outlined that the property totals six acres, and asked if we would be interested in buying it. I told him that it would depend on the property dimensions and the price... could he describe the property to me? The Guitreau family owns a sizable piece of property next to us, as well as a larger tract north of the creek (we have a long, narrow strip north of the creek, too). Kenny explained that his family wanted to sell a 100' wide strip along the whole east side of our front property, and including the large field next to our cemetery. (See the illustration on page four of the insert.) The Guitreau's would keep a 30' right-of-way to their wooded property beyond the creek. Kenny noted that certain individuals have sold property in our area for upwards of \$33,000 per acre, but the family would be happy to sell the land to the church for \$25,000 an acre (or \$150,000 total). I told Kenny that we didn't have that amount of money in unrestricted funds to offer them right now, and I would need to get diocesan approval as well as parish council approval to even begin that dialogue with them. Meanwhile, they knew that the church could use the extra land for the cemetery. I told them that I would have to do some research but we should stay in touch.

After contacting Mr. Joe Ingraham, the Chief Financial Officer for the Diocese, I was told that I would have immediate permission to buy the property and we could borrow the whole amount from the Diocese. Mr. Ingraham advised me to get an appraisal on the property, and a parishioner who specializes in real estate was happy to secure an appraisal for us free of charge. Based on the average selling prices for land acquisitions in our area over the last twenty years and its exact location, the Guitreau property was appraised at \$6,900 per acre due to its location next to the church and a cemetery (proximity to a cemetery tends to decrease land value). It also contains an old house which would have to be dismantled or moved. The most valuable attribute of the property is its connection to Highway 16 and the fact that it is on the French Settlement ridge (no flooding). The St. Joseph Parish Council heard all of this information in its Fall 2017 meeting, and recommended that we seek continued dialogue with the Guitreau family. In November 2017, I was informed that one member of the family was no longer interested in selling their share of the land, so I didn't make any announcements to the community. On February 15th (last week), a member of the Guitreau family approached one of our parishioners and said that all parties were once again in agreement to sell the property. That parishioner came and told me about it.

I am of the persuasion that sooner or later, someone will come to my office again and ask me if we are interested in the land. While we would be paying well above the appraisal value of the property, it would more than quadruple the size of our cemetery, and we could easily provide for the burial needs of our parishioners, as well as their family members and the greater community who would wish to be buried here. This land could provide burial space for the next 200 years of our history.

For the last eight years, people have been disappointed to learn that the St. Joseph cemetery has relatively few ground plots left, making it difficult for families to purchase plots all together. If this property were acquired, I believe that many families will be happy to secure ground plots for two or three generations, because they could purchase 20 plots for approximately \$10,000. Parishioners (those who are historically registered at St. Joseph or St. Stephen and have contributed to the overall maintenance of our churches and campuses) have the ability to purchase plots in their name for \$500 each. While we normally charge non-parishioners \$2,000 for plots in our cemeteries, we would also lower this rate to \$1,000 per plot if non-parishioners purchased during the first year after the acquisition. Please keep in mind that many of the cemeteries in surrounding cities charge at least \$5,000 for ground plots and have much greater restrictions/rules for their cemeteries. Even at \$2,000 per plot, our non-parishioner rate is really a great bargain.

Three years ago, I promised the parishioners of St. Joseph that I would do everything in my power to keep their parish debt-free... as it took much effort to pay off the new church. Over the last three years, we have invested a great deal into parish hall improvements and a new multi-purpose storage building, and we are now on our way to affording a new rectory with money in hand.

I have the greatest confidence that our community can pull together to make this land acquisition a reality, while paying off that \$150,000 loan within two to three months. How? We need commitments for 300 plots. Prayerfully consider where you wish your earthly remains to lie, waiting for the second coming of Christ. Have you thought about the cost of funerals? If you die unexpectedly, do you want your family members to have an additional burden of finding a burial place for you... only to find out that the cemetery plot or mausoleum crypt costs over \$5,000 elsewhere? Or, you couldn't be buried close to your other relatives because you didn't plan ahead? Would you like to be buried next to other members of your family? **All good questions to think about... right now.**

We need to have commitments for the purchase of only 300 parishioner plots, and we will fully pay for the cemetery expansion. As I write this article in the first week after the announcement, I already have commitments for 19 of those plots. How will this process move forward?

1. We gather parishioner and non-parishioners names, phone numbers, and the amount of plots they wish to purchase. Interested? We simply collect your information right now.
2. We move forward with our land dialogue, secure surveys, draw up the land sale document, and secure the loan from the Diocese of Baton Rouge. We make the land purchase.
3. We enter into a three-month sales period where those interested families are contacted, we meet with them and decide on the location of their plots, and the payments can be made over that three-month period (or possibly longer) which will be applied to the diocesan loan.

4. Once the loan is paid off completely, we will place all future sale proceeds into our newly-created **St. Joseph Catholic Cemeteries Endowment Fund** at the Baton Rouge Area Foundation. It will slowly grow with each plot sale and perpetually generate 5% interest. As the endowment grows, the earnings will eventually take care of 100% of the costs that we currently pay for lawn care and improvements to our three cemeteries (St. Joseph, St. William, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help). Future priests cannot deplete or use these funds for any other purpose than cemetery maintenance and improvements. So...

--WHERE WILL YOUR BODY REST UNTIL CHRIST COMES AGAIN?

--YOU SAT NEXT TO THEM AND OFFERED THEM THE "SIGN OF PEACE" AT MASS EVERY WEEK... WHY NOT "REST IN PEACE" NEXT TO THEM A LITTLE LONGER?

--FACE EAST WITH ALL YOUR CHURCH FRIENDS AS WE AWAIT THE GLORIFIED BODY AND THE NEW HEAVEN AND THE NEW EARTH!

In conclusion, thanks for taking the time to read about our hopeful cemetery expansion. In other news, we were sad to hear that ACME Mausoleum Company recently announced that they are going out of business. They built all three of our mausoleums, including the newest one. The good news: St. Joseph Parish was able to purchase several unsold crypts and niches back from them at construction cost. Therefore, we are able to offer about 12 double-occupancy crypts and roughly 18 cremation niches at 20% off the original price. In other words, an \$8,100 crypt (space for two caskets) is now available for \$6,480. A cremation niche that was originally priced at \$1,600 will now sell for \$1,280. Please call the office ASAP if you are interested in the mausoleum spaces at these reduced prices, because you won't find them cheaper anywhere else in the retail market.

STATEMENT OF INTEREST

Yes, Fr. Jason... Our family is interested in being a part of the St. Joseph cemetery expansion and resting on the holy ground!

Name: _____

Phone: _____

We are: _____ Registered Parishioners _____ Non-Registered Visitors

Number of cemetery plots we would like to commit to buying: _____ (specify number)

Please detach, and place this form in the collection basket at any St. Joseph or St. Stephen Mass, or hand it to Fr. Jason, or bring to the office. **SEND NO MONEY NOW.** Thank you for considering your final arrangements and helping to relieve part of your family's burden when the Lord calls you home.

Neighbors



GUI TREAU
WOODED
PROPERTY



CREEK

Neighbors

NEW
RECTORY



GRAVEL DRIVE-WAY

Neighbors

CURRENT
CEMETERY



HIGHWAY 444

New
Church

M#1 M#2 M#3

PSR
#2

Parish
Hall

PSR
#1

Neighbors

St.
Joseph

Old
Church

Office
Rectory

→ GUI TREAU RIGHT-OF-WAY TO WOODED PROPERTY →

Neighbors

HIGHWAY 16