

St. Austin's Capital Campaign 3/7/15

My name is Bill Penn and I am one of the volunteers on the capital campaign. I have been asked to share a bit of why this is important to me and why I feel privileged to be a volunteer. I find this difficult to do, not because I do not know what to say, but because I have way too much to say in the very limited time I have to say it.

Oh, St. Austin's, how do I love thee! How can I count the ways!

My connection to St. Austin's goes back over 50 years; like many of us it began with my moving to Austin to attend UT. For me this was 1958 and the first place I lived was in the San Antonio Arms, a building that no longer exists, but was on San Antonio directly across from St. Austin's School. I was not Catholic, nor in any sense Christian at the time. My journey to the richness of the Catholic faith was a long and arduous one, but it clearly began in 1958 when I lived across the street from St. Austin's. I was moved just going down the side walk even as I glanced briefly in from "the outside" seeing the joy in the children, the love and commitment tangible on the faces of their parents and teachers. St. Austin's was also the very first place I ever attended a Catholic mass.

And now I am fully on "the inside", privileged to be a registered, pledging member on St. Austin's parish roll, and privileged to be a part of this critically important capital campaign.

We are fed by a rich sacramental life and liturgical calendar, nourished by the challenging, thoughtful homilies and personal care of our Paulist Fathers. We have a splendid parish school and exceptionally active lay ministries reaching out both within and outside the church to those in need. This is central to the Paulist mission; we all know and appreciate that. It is in part why we are here. Laity are respected and honored at St. Austin's. We have an incredible music ministry and a rich plethora of education, personal enrichment, and social justice programs.

There is so much to be grateful, joyful about, but there are also serious issues, harder, more challenging things.

This calls for a change in focus. The question now is:

*Oh St. Austin's, how do **we** love thee, how can **we** count the ways?*

One very down to earth, realistic way to look at how and what we love is to examine our checkbooks. Just review yours, go through it, and it will point very clearly to the really important things in your life. Might it be a very loving and really important thing to make more room for St. Austin's in our checkbooks?

We are involved in a critical capital campaign, our goal is 4 million, and we must reach it to resolve pressing issues. The necessary physical maintenance of our church and physical plant have been terribly deferred. We must refurbish the church bathrooms and parish offices. And we need to pay down substantial debt so we can free up more funds for ministry and outreach. If we successfully complete this campaign in only five years we will be largely debt free.

These are all doable goals if our parish will stand as one, with everyone putting their shoulders to the task. But it doesn't work very well when only about 1 in 4 registered households in our parish actually stands up and makes a commitment. It puts too great a burden on too few shoulders.

We have currently received over 1.8 million in pledges. We are almost half way to the 4 million, but we are in a critical period. A generous benefactor has committed a one million matching grant when parish pledges reach the 2.25 million level. We need your help; no pledge is too small. As Father Chuck repeatedly, and appropriately, keeps reminding us. Faith is a challenge, a test, and it requires generous, open, joyful hearts, making sacrificial gifts to meet it.

I heard a startling story from one of our parishioners who graciously met with me to fill out his pledge card. He was on the east side of the drag walking to church. He found himself chatting with a student who asked him where he was headed. He responded, "St. Austin's." "Where's that?" replied the student. The parishioner pointed to the church directly across the street. The student looked and responded, "I didn't know that was a church. I thought it was just a bunch of old abandoned buildings."

We can't allow this to continue. Let's be realistic. Money is bread. It's a source of nourishment, energy and care, necessary, essential to fulfilling our mission.

*Oh Saint Austin's, how do **we** love thee, how can **we** count the ways?*

If you haven't yet responded to a pledge volunteer's call please get back to them. I assure you, it will bring joy to their hearts. If you haven't yet heard from anyone let one of the priests or the parish office know so we can keep this ball rolling. And if you can dig deeper and find a way to give yet more, it helps. We need everyone's assistance. We need it now. You can also do it by phone if this works best for you.

When you actually stand up and do it, you will be glad that you did. And many will benefit from your generosity for many years to come. Generous hearts are joyful hearts. Come let us together share this joy.

Thank you and God bless you all.