



## RETIREMENT WITH A HALO

# Father Whitney Miller refocuses energy on future of St. Louis Catholic High

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — Reverend Whitney G. Miller made history by being the first priest ordained in 1980 for the newly formed Diocese of Lake Charles. Now that he has reached the well-deserved retirement age of 70, he has a message to share: “I am refocusing. I am not retiring!”

Father Whitney sat down recently to share his goals for this new season in his nearly 45 years of priesthood.

“I am in much too good health, and I still have a good mind. As long as the Lord wants to keep using me, I want to serve,” he expressed, even as he transitions to the role of senior priest.

“What I am finding at age 70 is more about my energy level. My spirit is still very willing, but my body limits me now,” he acknowledged. “I am using this particular season where I want to be fair to the things I commit myself.”

If there is such a thing as full-time retirement for a priest, that is at least five years down the road for Father Whitney. After much prayer with his spiritual director, the Jennings native will focus his time on the future of St. Louis Catholic High School that broke ground for its new Corbina Road campus on January 12.

“The energy I have left and the years I have left, historically, I am hitting it at a time when there is a great amount of need at St. Louis with both fundraising and rebuilding,” said Father Whitney, who served as Rector of the lone Catholic high school between 1999-2007. It was during that time that he led the successful “Opening Windows” capital campaign to fund the high school’s renovations.

Now as co-chair of the “Spreading Roots, Growing Saints” capital campaign to build the new school, seeing the construction project come to fruition is his top priority.

The first phase of construction includes the academic and administration buildings. Father Whitney said enough money has been raised to also build the science wing and cafeteria, and he prays it won’t be long before the gymnasium is fully funded as well.

Bishop Glen John Provost recognizes the special gift Father Whitney has in bringing people together to work for a common goal.

“We know of his contributions to St. Louis Catholic High School and how, under the initiative of my predecessor, Bishop Edward Braxton, Father Whitney led a capital campaign for needed improvements at the school,” the bishop said. “He demonstrated his many talents then and continues to do so now as we address the building of a new campus for St. Louis.”

Bishop Provost expressed his confidence that “with Father Whitney’s leadership, working closely with Father (Ruben) Buller, St. Louis Rector, and the school community, we will accomplish our task.”

Father Whitney said that he is “very appreciative to Bishop Provost and Father Buller for allowing me to be in this position. As the current Rector, Father Buller has been so affirming and so encouraging.”

A plate that has been spinning for much of Father Whitney’s ministry has been his role as Director of Counseling Services for the Diocese of Lake Charles since 1999. While he is letting go of that position and no longer taking new clients for counseling, he said as part of his presence on the St. Louis campus, he will continue to do counseling for the students, faculty, and staff.

His schedule on campus will include Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays, leaving him a four-day weekend to spend more time with family or doing things of his choosing.

“I have a brother in Thibodaux, another brother in Houston, and a sister in Carthage, Texas. I plan on spending more time with family, including my 13 godchildren,” he remarked.



Rev. Whitney G. Miller, the first priest ordained in 1980 for the Diocese of Lake Charles, said he is “refocusing, not retiring,” now that he has turned 70.

### Road to Priesthood

Father Whitney said he always knew he wanted to be a priest from as far back as kindergarten.

“I often say if there would have been an elementary seminary I could have gone to, I would have gone,” he chuckled. “I was a holy little kid. I loved to pray. After my paper route, I can remember stopping by the church to make a tabernacle visit. The nuns at the Catholic elementary school I attended were always picking me to do the readings, and the priests asked me to serve. I say I have been a priest all my life.”

Father Whitney recalls the Teresian Sisters at his school being great storytellers.

“I always found their stories about the saints fascinating,” he said. “Even though I did not quite understand everything at a young age, I was inspired by the heroic stories of the saints. To me, they were spiritual heroes, and that is what I wanted to be when I grew up.”

Having studied at Immaculata Seminary in Lafayette, St. Joseph Seminary College in Saint Benedict, La.; and St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minn.; Father Whitney would eventually be ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Lake Charles on June 6, 1980, by Bishop Jude Speyrer. He celebrated his first Mass on June 7 in his home parish at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church in Jennings.

During his seminary formation, Father Whitney considered other vocations.

“When I was at St. Joseph Seminary College, I had a very good professor of psychology,” he recalled. “For a time, I was discerning whether I wanted to become a psychologist or a counselor. There was also a period when I wanted to be a Benedictine monk because I have a real contemplative side, but I felt that God was calling me to diocesan ministry.”

Realizing that nothing was lost, Father Whitney recognized that God took care of both those vocations through his role as diocesan counselor and later during his 10 years as retreat director at Saint Charles Center in Moss Bluff.

Assignments over the years have included Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish (Parochial Vicar), 1980-1983; Our Lady of Seven Dolors Parish (Pastor), 1983-1991; Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish (Administrator), 1996-1999; Director of Diocesan Counseling, 1999-2024; St. Louis Catholic High School (Rector), 1999-2007; Secretary for Christian Formation, 2007-2010; Director of Saint Charles Center, 2010-2020; St. Philip Neri Parish (Pastor), June 2020-January 2021; St. Louis Catholic High School (Counselor), 2021 to present.

### A gift to the Lord

Father Whitney said the theme of his priesthood has always been to give to the Lord what he has, even when it does not seem like much, and God does great things with it.

“The readings at the first Mass I celebrated were based on John’s Gospel of the miracle of multiplication of the fishes and loaves. The young boy believes that Jesus can do miracles with the little bit of food that he has,” said Father Whitney.

“When you give what little you have to the Lord, it is amazing to watch the multiplication of gifts in the work that you do. As a minister, I receive back so much more than I could ever give,” he said. “People, especially in Southwest Louisiana, are incredibly good to their priests. They love to give back in any way that they can. That is encouraging.”

### Expression of gratitude

Bishop Provost expressed his gratitude for Father Whitney’s many years of ministry helping lead a great number to Christ.

“One area that needs emphasis when reflecting on Father Whitney’s rich life and ministry is his skill in public speaking and presenting the teachings of the Church in an effective manner,” the bishop shared.

“Father Whitney has been and continues to be a good and faithful priest, offering dedicated service, expert counseling, and effective leadership in so many areas that have benefited the faithful of the Diocese of Lake Charles.”

### One final thought

When Father Whitney thinks back on this little country boy from Jennings and if you asked him in elementary school, “Do you think you will ever get a Ph.D. in Psychology? Do you think you will ever run a retreat center or the Catholic high school in Lake Charles?” He would have said, “No way, I can barely put together a sentence!”

He declared, “The good work that God has done in and through me and the people I have worked with is amazing, amazing!”



Rev. Whitney G. Miller (left) was ordained to the priesthood for the Diocese of Lake Charles on June 6, 1980, by the Most Reverend Jude Speyrer, founding bishop (middle), in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Catholic Church. Also present was Deacon Bud Kaicher (right) from San Diego, Calif., a classmate of Father Whitney from St. John Seminary.



Father Whitney Miller is joined by his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Lawrence Miller (Johnny and Gwin), and his grandmother Hortense LaCour at the reception following his First Mass of Thanksgiving at Our Lady Help of Christians Catholic Church in Jennings on June 7, 1980.

### Mardi Gras Office Closure

The Chancery and Offices of the Diocese of Lake Charles will be closed on Monday, March 3, and Tuesday, March 4, for Mardi Gras. They will reopen for regular business hours, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., on Wednesday, March 5 — Ash Wednesday — the beginning of Lent. Bishop Glen John Provost will be the celebrant of the 12:05 p.m. Mass on Ash Wednesday in the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, 935 Bilbo Street, and will distribute ashes to the faithful.



## ST. LOUIS CATHOLIC HIGH GROUNDBREAKING School heroes are families who persevered

By Pamela Seal  
Diocese of Lake Charles

LAKE CHARLES — A frigid rainy afternoon did not dampen the spirits of nearly 300 students, faculty, alumni, clergy, and officials who enthusiastically turned out for the groundbreaking of St. Louis Catholic High School on Sunday, January 12, 2025.

“All I can say is WOW! We were not expecting such an amazing turnout today with this weather,” said Principal Kelly DeMolle in response to the tremendous attendance.

The groundbreaking coincided with the Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord, which marks the close of the Christmas season.

“I thought it was most fitting that our groundbreaking was today as our last gift during the Christmas season. I am very thankful for this gift today,” DeMolle expressed.

In a span of 36 hours, plans for the ceremony shifted across the street from the 4301 Corbina Road school site to an enclosed heated tent at The Village of Morganfield. DeMolle praised several for pivoting so quickly to ensure a successful celebration.

“Rob (Acord) and Jason (Garcille) went to the site, got dirt from the property and put it in planters so that we could have a true groundbreaking,” DeMolle said. “We will be bringing this exact dirt back to our property, so it is legit,” drawing laughter from the crowd.

“It is a true honor to gather here today as we mark the beginning of a new chapter in this storied history of our school,” the principal remarked. “This milestone has been four years in the making, and we are filled with excitement as we witness the fruits of our collective efforts.”

The former campus was destroyed by Hurricane Laura on August 27, 2020. The high school has been operating in modular buildings in the time since.

The January 12 groundbreaking was made even more special with several personal touches, including St. Louis Catholic High School coffee made by FBLA students; a huge pot of pastelaya cooked by Chef Randall Edwards, a member of the SLCHS faculty; symbolic SLCHS images designed by the school’s art students to enhance the groundbreaking shovels; and a scrumptious strawberry cake provided by Pronia’s Deli.

People were also invited to fill out prayer cards to be placed in a box and later buried

beneath the foundation of the new school symbolizing collective hopes and prayers for the new campus.

### Heroes of St. Louis

“The rebuilding of St. Louis Catholic High School is a story of survival, resilience, and faith,” said Mary Ann Moses, Chair of the New Campus Committee, in her remarks to those gathered. “Future students and faculties will forever walk in the footsteps that you leave behind.”

Directing comments to His Excellency, Bishop Glen John Provost, Moses said, “I have seen your unwavering support of our schools and your vision for the new campus. Figuratively and literally, we will see your hand in the design. Today, we are delighted to put a shovel in that hand!”

Moses emphasized the importance of Catholic education to so many families who stayed with St. Louis throughout these past four years.

“St. Louis was the most damaged high school in Southwest Louisiana and yet it was the first to reopen after Hurricane Laura. Even though the students and the faculty not once re-entered their brick-and-mortar buildings, they never took a step back, only forward,” said Moses. “The true heroes are the families, the students, and the faculty that have stayed with St. Louis and have kept it a thriving school.”

Moses also conveyed her gratitude for the FEMA response that got St. Louis Catholic back on its feet as well as their presence on the day of the groundbreaking.

Rona Marshall, FEMA’s Louisiana Integration and Recovery Office Chief of Staff, said that the federal agency is “proud to be a part in the rebuilding of the high school as well as several other rebuilding, elevation and historical preservation projects in partnership with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Lake Charles.”

“The word resilience really emanates seeing all of you here today with the weather being as bad as it is,” Marshall continued. “I am so very touched. Today is an exciting start to a new beginning for St. Louis Catholic High School.”

### Acknowledgments

Rob Acord, Director of Advancement, took a few moments to express gratitude to a



Dirt from the site of the future St. Louis Catholic High School is turned with ceremonial gold shovels during the official groundbreaking of the school on Sunday, January 12, 2025. From right, are Principal Kelly DeMolle, Bishop Glen John Provost, Very Rev. Ruben J. Buller, Rector; and Superintendent Kimberlee Gazzolo.

few key individuals, beginning with Bishop Provost for his support and guidance.

“Your leadership has been instrumental, and we are deeply grateful to your commitment to St. Louis Catholic High School,” he said. Acord also thanked Governor Jeff Landry, state Senator Mark Abraham, Congressman Clay Higgins, Mayor Nic Hunter; and Stephanie Rodrigue, Director of Temporal Goods, noting that their support has been “invaluable” to move this project forward.

“We are profoundly grateful to our Board of Pastors; our Rector, Father Ruben Buller, and our dedicated principal Kelly DeMolle for your tireless leadership and commitment in this vision,” Acord continued.

A special thank you was extended to architects Champeaux Evans Hotard + RHH Architects, APAC, A Joint Venture; Superintendent Kimberlee Gazzolo; Father Whitney Miller and Mike Veron, chairmen of the “Spreading Roots, Growing Saints” Capital Campaign; and past principal Mia

Touchet.

The efforts of past Director of Advancement Matt Fontenot; past Rector, Father Nathan Long; members of various committees, and the St. Louis Catholic High School Foundation were also acknowledged.

Extending a special thank you to Mrs. Moses for her dedication of countless hours behind the scenes, Acord said, “Her commitment and tireless efforts have been pivotal to making this day possible.”

Following a Prayer of Blessing by Bishop Provost and music led by Colette Tanner and Father Whitney Miller, the first of several ceremonial groundbreaking photos took place as all sang, “When the Saints Go Marching In.”

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To continue marching forward with St. Louis Catholic High School, visit their website at [www.slchs.org](http://www.slchs.org) for information on the “Spreading Roots, Growing Saints” Capital Campaign.

## Recovery for Sacred Heart of Jesus – LC advances with \$4.8M in federal funding

LAKE CHARLES — the future, building on its rich past and legacy.” The reimbursement will be made at 90 percent federal cost-share and authorized under Section 406 of the Robert T. Stafford Act.

Upon hearing of the FEMA obligation for Sacred Heart Parish, Reverend Joby Mathew, H.G.N., Pastor, shared the following statement:

“With hearts full of gratitude, we give thanks to the Lord, who hears the prayers of His faithful. This blessing is a testament to God’s providence and a call for us to remain steadfast in faith.

“In this Jubilee Year, as pilgrims of hope, we are reminded that perseverance in prayer and trust in the Lord will always guide us forward.

“I am deeply grateful to our parishioners for their unwavering faith, to Bishop Provost for his steadfast support, and to Congressman Higgins for his advocacy on our behalf. We also thank all those whose efforts have brought us to this moment.

“As we look ahead to the work of repair and rebuilding, may we continue to walk in faith, strengthened by God’s grace and united in His love.”

Much of congressional work to advance recovery projects occurs behind the scenes, and Congressman Higgins has played an important role in federal assistance for the Diocese of Lake Charles.

“South Louisiana stands strong through every storm. To date, my office has worked

tirelessly to deliver over \$5 billion in disaster recovery relief,” Congressman Higgins said in a statement about the funding. “Our office will continue to prioritize hurricane recovery and work with our local, state, and federal partners to ensure that much needed resources are delivered for strong economic growth and prosperity.”

Once a project is obligated by FEMA, the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP) will work closely with the Diocese to finalize the grant, begin the reimbursement process for expenditures to date, and allow for Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish — established in 1919 — to work with Architect Randy Goodloe on determining budgets for various phases of repairs. Since FEMA funding is a reimbursement program, expenditures for eligible work completed must be submitted before the funds are reimbursed.

Pending additional significant obligations from FEMA for completed work that the Diocese of Lake Charles has funded, as well as providing substantial project budgeting details, there are many churches, parish halls, administrative and other ancillary structures that are waiting to begin the repair or rebuild processes.

Presented by Fleur de Lis District of Theresians SWLA

GUEST SPEAKER  
REV. JEFFREY  
STARKOVICH

MARCH  
15  
SATURDAY

8:30AM  
TO  
12:30PM

WOMEN’S MORNING  
OF REFLECTION



\$30 BY MARCH 1 | \$35 AFTER MARCH 1

CAMP KAROL, 1087 BOZO ROAD, MOSS BLUFF

FOR QUESTIONS, CONTACT EILEEN ESKEW AT 337-658-7327

Women from all faith traditions are welcome to attend the Fleur de Lis District of Theresians of SWLA Women’s Morning of Reflection on Saturday, March 15, — 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. — at Camp Karol, 1087 Bozo Road. Speaking on the topic “Walking with Jesus in a Troubled World” will be the Rev. Jeffrey Starkovich, Pastor of St. Pius X Catholic Church in Ragley. Cost for the event, which includes a Continental breakfast, is \$30 by March 1, and \$35 after March 1. Registration for Theresians available online with Sacred Touchstones, and non-Theresians can register at [www.Theresians.org/events](http://www.Theresians.org/events).



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Sunday, March 30th 11:30am-1:30pm

Location: The Historic Cash & Carry

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[reception@catholiccharitiesswla.org](mailto:reception@catholiccharitiesswla.org) or 337-439-7436

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