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## Construction continues on new church

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ST. JOHN | Windshield wipers cleared a steady stream of raindrops off the Rev. Sammie Maletta's car window Wednesday morning as he pulled up to the site of a project that has consumed his time in recent years.

Maletta, pastor of St. John the Evangelist Parish in St. John, is leading his flock about a mile south to accommodate overcrowded Masses. The new church will seat 1,200 people and have standing room for about 200 more, he said.

Maletta shrugged off the rough weather as he envisioned what the site will look like in six months.

"It will be a great witness on Sunday mornings," he said.

Cost of the new church is estimated at \$12.5 million.

Many parishioners have purchased houses near the new church, which is nestled off a roundabout in a new subdivision. The church bells will draw them from their homes on Sunday mornings, guiding them to Mass, Maletta said.

The new church and the adjoining prayer trail called The Shrine of Christ's Passion both are to open in the spring. But the visitor center and gift shop for the prayer trail should open the first week of December.

Merchandise stocking in the visitor center begins Monday, said Paul Anderson, visitor center and store manager.

The purpose of the store, which will feature a fireplace, reading area, bathrooms designed to resemble Ritz Carlton bathrooms, a television and a slew of merchandise, is to support the maintenance cost of the prayer trail, Anderson said.

People will be able to relax at an outdoor area behind the visitor center or pause to reflect at the

Sanctity of Life shrine beside the center. The shrine will have a black tombstone in honor of the unborn and a statue of Jesus with a tear in his eye, holding a baby.

Visitors can walk the stamped concrete trail, and those who can't walk can ride in a golf cart to each station of the cross. Music will play throughout the trail, and recordings of broadcaster Bill Curtis will guide people through reflection at each station, Maletta said.

Bronze statues will depict the stations. The first two, of Jesus and Pilate, already are in place. Pilate and his chair weigh about 700 pounds, Anderson said.

At the end of the trail, a statue will feature Jesus rising 30 feet above the ground, Maletta said.

The trail is expected to draw people from all over the country. Brochures are being distributed and will be stocked in local hotel lobbies.

The new church overlooks the trail from the west.

It is 43,000 square feet and about 135 feet high at its tallest point said, Michael Muenich, who is working as the church's project manager.

Inside, drywall has given shape to the walls and outlined slots where stained glass will be installed. Every window, every pattern, every architectural feature is symbolic, even the dramatic change in ceiling height into the church, Maletta said

Themes in the existing church will carry into the new church, like the star cross design, the shape and size of the pillars and stained glass windows depicting the same scenes as in the current church, Maletta said.

Fiber optic lighting in the baptismal font will make the water glisten. Stage lighting will shine on the tabernacle, and when Mass starts, it will dim and focus on the altar, he said.

The words, "To the greater glory of God" will be written in Latin, reminding people why they're there.

All of the artwork was commissioned, Maletta said.

So far, the parishioners have paid for the cost of everything, and there's money in the bank. At some point, they will have to borrow money, but they haven't yet, Maletta said.

For more information on the prayer trail, visit <http://www.shrineofchristspassion.org>.

### **About the shrine**

-- The Shrine of Christ's Passion is an interactive, year-around half-mile winding pathway. It depicts the passion of Christ, as depicted in the Stations of the Cross.

-- Journey includes 40 life-size statues

-- Each station will have a listening station, which will include an audio description and prayer.

-- The pathway is illuminated for early evening use.

-- The shrine will be operated by a private, nonprofit corporation.

**About the store**

The visitors center will be home to a retail store that will offer a variety of inspirational gifts and books for people of all faiths. Net proceeds will fund The Shrine of Christ's Passion.

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