

LEGACY FOR OUR MISSION:

For Our Children and the Future

CONNERSVILLE PARISH SERVES CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, HOME MISSION NEEDS

THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF ST. GABRIEL PARISH IS POISED TO PROVIDE ITS MINISTRIES TO PEOPLE THROUGHOUT CONNERSVILLE AND FAYETTE COUNTY, BUT THE PARISH IS ALSO CHALLENGED BY FAMILIAR FINANCIAL AND PHYSICAL DEMANDS THAT STRETCH ITS RESOURCES TO THE LIMIT.

As the only Catholic parish in its county, St. Gabriel serves people within an area that is considered a home mission. In other words, it's one of the parishes that clearly needs to be where it is but requires the collective support of all Catholics throughout the archdiocese to carry out its vital work. Those challenges include significant deferred maintenance needs with its parish buildings, including those at St. Gabriel School, the only Catholic school in the county.

The Connersville community has also been hit hard with job loss and a declining population, so it takes an optimist to see the light. That's where a special fund called the Saint Francis Xavier Home Mission Fund comes into play. The fund comes from parishes throughout the archdiocese that exceed their United Catholic Appeal goals.

St. Gabriel has received generous grants from the home mission fund of the archdiocese, said Father Stanley Herber, the pastor of St. Gabriel for the past 10 years. These funds have supported the parish by helping it pay for a variety of expenses, especially those connected with St. Gabriel School.

"We would be struggling without the funds," Father Herber said. "We wouldn't be able to maintain our ministries otherwise."

And when it comes to containing expenses so those ministries can be sustained, the pastor ensures his actions speak as loudly as his words. Father Herber handles his own meal preparations and housework. He might have taken inspiration from the many St. Gabriel parishioners who have contributed their volunteer time and talents to address needs that were previously taken care of through paid services.



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Just a few years after celebrating the parish's 150th anniversary in 2001, St. Gabriel's people have turned an eye to the future and begun the early planning stages for their role in the Legacy for Our Mission campaign. The parish community will take part in the campaign next spring and have begun discussing the most pressing needs for its aging physical facilities.

But the Legacy for Our Mission campaign offers St. Gabriel some cause for confidence. A successful parish fundraising effort in the 1990s and a recent archdiocesan capital campaign assisted St. Gabriel in the renovation and expansion of its 1950s-era school building.

Today parish leaders are left with a discussion of what to do with the 1920s-era building. The Catholic community would like to preserve its past, Father Herber says, but its people must consider the critical need for a new family life center. Existing St. Gabriel facilities simply do not meet current building standards and are therefore not welcoming for elderly or disabled people.

St. Gabriel's parish council members will study the dilemma, but it seems to be a challenge the parish can handle. Despite the tough economic times in Connersville, the St. Gabriel community is holding strong. The parish established the St. Gabriel School Endowment in 1998 to provide students with tuition assistance, and it plans to continue growing that endowment as the Legacy for Our Mission campaign approaches. Today the school serves more than 100 students in preschool through sixth grade; many are from non-Catholic families or need help with school costs.

Other evidence of stewardship and volunteerism are evident. The parish recently developed a ministry to men at the city jail. It's also a contributing member to Connersville's Hope Pregnancy Care Center, a cooperative program that helps women with crisis pregnancies.

Those efforts are just part of St. Gabriel's broader mission of serving the greater community while striving to take care of its own needs.

"We have a very good sense of parish here," Father Herber said. "We really just need to hang in there for the future. Connersville isn't a growth community, so we believe we need to grow from within."

Legacy for Our Mission, the archdiocese's capital campaign, is guided by the principles of Christian stewardship and addresses the needs of archdiocesan ministries such as Home Missions. By contributing to Legacy for Our Mission through your local parish, a portion of your gift will be allocated to Home Mission programs and distributed to Parishes in need such as St. Gabriel Parish in Connersville, Ind.