

LEGACY FOR OUR MISSION:

For Our Children and the Future

SAINT ANN DENTAL SERVICES PROVIDE DENTAL ATTENTION TO THE UNDERSERVED

People fear going to the dentist, but imagine the fear of being unable to have a painful tooth treated due to the cost or a lack of insurance.

Such was the case for one 24-year-old woman who died from an abscessed tooth that had gone untreated for far too long, leaving two young children behind.

Mortified by this story, Sister of Providence Connie Kramer of St. Ann Parish in Terre Haute decided to help uninsured individuals living in poverty seek the dental attention they desperately needed. Kramer explained that 30 percent of people at the poverty level who seek free medical care also need dental care. There was clearly a need for the parish to help the underserved within the Wabash Valley area, she said.

Today, the St. Ann Community Outreach Service of Terre Haute runs Saint Ann Dental Services as a way to offer emergency dental care that relieves acute pain and infection, primarily through extractions. The dental services are a Highlighted Program of the United Way of Wabash Valley and Catholic Charities Terre Haute.

"We opened our doors on January 12, 2005, with a three-year backlog of people waiting for services," said Sister Connie, director of Saint Ann Dental Services. "Today, we are down to a six-month backlog. In the first year, we had 200 appointments. In the first quarter of this year, we have had 99 appointments. So we are in the role of doubling."

Sister Connie said a continuing need for dental services persists because many people don't understand the seriousness of proper dental care, nor do they have access to adequate medical attention.

Terri Mascari, a dental hygienist for more than 20 years and a volunteer at Saint Ann Dental Services, says the buildup



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of dead bacteria on teeth can have serious repercussions on a person's health. It also can be a precursor to stroke, heart disease, underweight infants and diabetic complications.

"People have a narrow view about the poor," Mascari said. "They are trying to change their lives, but they are so scared because they have been mistreated before. No one should have to suffer like that. I don't care who you are."

It's the passion of the volunteers like Mascari and the seven dentists who provide services once a month that enables the dental services to provide services to people in need.

"It has always been my vision to take the gift that God has given me to help the poor," Mascari said. "I always thought I'd be working in a third-world country. I never thought I'd be right here, but I'm helping here because that is what God wants."

In the summer of 2001, St. Ann Parish received a significant grant from the St. Francis Xavier Home Mission Fund, made possible from gifts directed to the United Catholic Appeal. These funds were used to renovate the second floor of the former St. Ann School building which was originally constructed in 1906. Saint Ann Dental Services now resides in an infrastructure dedicated to ministry, as this building also currently houses a medical clinic sponsored by the Providence Self Sufficiency Ministries, Inc.

"Our goal is to secure another 100 years of ministry in this building," Sister Connie said. "We want to be able to have funding to maintain this care and expand the number of volunteers and hours of operation."

The dental services would not be possible without the support from St. Ann Parish. From helping with building renovations to hours of prayer, Mascari said the small parish comes together for the cause.

"They are a true godsend and backbone to the clinic," she said. "I don't think they realize the credit they deserve."

Legacy for Our Mission, the archdiocesan capital campaign, is guided by the principles of Christian stewardship and addresses the local and changing needs of Archdiocesan Ministries such as Home Missions. By contributing to the Legacy for Our Mission campaign, a portion of your gift will be allocated to Home Missions programs and distributed to parishes in need such as St. Ann Parish in Terre Haute.