

## **St. Gregory Parish in Marysville, Establishes New Endowment for the School.**

“Young people are a valued treasure and the future leaders of our Church. It is the responsibility of the entire Catholic community—bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and laity—to continue to strive towards the goal of making our Catholic elementary and secondary schools available, accessible, and affordable to all Catholic parents and their children, including those who are poor and middle class.” (*Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium*, 2005, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.)

The above words begin the introduction to the 2005 Bishops' document on Catholic education. Over a hundred years before the Bishops' document, the poor German immigrants who occupied the area around Marysville, Kansas demonstrated the same admiration and commitment to Catholic education. The tradition of St. Gregory Catholic School began way back in 1881 when Fr. John Pichler started holding classes in the basement of one of the early wood frame churches built in 1878 near the Marysville railroad depot. Later, classes were moved to the basement of the church being built on the site of the present parish campus. Students attended class while workers constructed the church above them. In 1903 Benedictine sisters arrived to teach at Marysville and the first school building built on parish property was completed in 1906 at a cost of \$8,600. At the time, St. Gregory's had only about 100 families. A line from the history of St. Gregory's parish states that the diocesan policy concerning the starting of a Catholic school was that “Whenever twenty-five children within a radius of two miles can be found, a parochial school should be started.” These first parishioners, many newly arrived immigrants, were serious about establishing and supporting Catholic schools.

The good people of St. Gregory's parish have continued their tradition of supporting Catholic education over the many years of the parish's existence. In 1952 a 13,800 sq. ft. new school building was completed and was dedicated by Archbishop Hunkler on April 12<sup>th</sup> of that year. That facility served the parish community well for five decades and continues to do so since it was completely renovated when it became part of the “newest” St. Gregory School, dedicated by Archbishop Keleher on January 27, 2002. This newest era for St. Gregory's was ushered in not only by renovation of the existing school, but also by an addition of a new two story wing which included a gym, library and computer lab, science, art and music rooms and also provided space for school and parish offices as well as parish meeting facilities. Since 2002, St. Gregory's has been blessed to be able to occupy what many believe to be one of the finest rural Catholic school facilities in our archdiocese.

But operating a Catholic school, especially in this day of high health care costs for teachers and staff, can be quite a financial challenge for a parish. St. Gregory's has never charged any substantial tuition to the families of students who attend the parish school. The parish community as a whole takes on the responsibility of funding the school through weekly contributions. In addition, the school depends on gifts from benefactors, aid from the Catholic Education Foundation, as well as bequests and memorials. While some school families are blessed with the ability to make substantial contributions in support of the parish, many school families have modest incomes and qualify for the federal “free and reduced lunch” program. In that sense, rural schools are akin to inner city schools which serve a significant number of low income families.

Many years ago an initiative was undertaken to provide for long term funding of the parish school through the establishment of an “endowment.” Funds were collected, often from posthumous gifts or from gifts given after a year of productive crops, and were held in a variety of investment instruments. No matter how the money was held, the principal was not accessed and the school benefited from the interest earned. These funds given for the on-going support of the parish school were invested through several institutions and few were held in true endowments with the accompanying legal

protections. Over time, with the change of pastors and the turnover of financial advisors, the opportunity for confusion concerning the designated purpose of the donated funds became a real possibility.

In 1996 St. Gregory's established two true endowments through *The Catholic Foundation of Northeast Kansas*. One was for the future needs of the parish, including the parish school and the other was for the perpetual care of the parish cemetery. However, there were still funds which had been donated for the long term support of the parish school that were deposited in other local accounts.

In 2007, all the funds which had been designated by donors for the on-going support of the parish school were consolidated into a new endowment, *The St. Gregory School Endowment*, established through *The Catholic Foundation of Northeast Kansas*. These funds came from recent bequests or funeral memorials, from other investment instruments as they matured and a large amount of it was transferred from the archdiocesan deposit and loan account where it had been sitting for some time earning only modest interest.

St. Gregory Parish currently has three endowment funds with total assets of over \$448,000. The parish plans to soon transfer additional funds when previously established investments reach their maturity dates. The current pastor of St. Gregory's would like to see the school endowment reach a million dollars or more, but that will take some time. When donor gifts are placed in legally established endowments the school is insured of not only on-going income from the investment earnings, but when interest rates are high, some of the proceeds are returned to the fund and help build the principal. Other advantages are that donor intentions are faithfully honored and the funds are protected against most legal claims, thus insuring a secure financial resource for the parish school.

Parishioners at St. Gregory's are urged to remember the school endowment when making decisions concerning estate planning and planned giving. Like many rural parishes, St. Gregory's has a significant number of older parishioners who have faithfully supported the parish school all of their adult lives. Designating gifts to the school endowment as part of one's estate planning can help insure the future viability of Catholic education in Marysville. The parish is also in the process of getting the message about the school endowment out to alumni who no longer live in Marysville. Many of them have fond memories of their years at St. Gregory's and the parish is hoping they will support the school's future by contributing to the endowment now or as part of their planned giving.

In 1995, while addressing the young people at World Youth Day in the Philippines, the late Holy Father, John Paul II said the following:

What is needed today is a Church which knows how to respond to the expectations of young people. Jesus wants to enter into dialogue with them, through his body which is the Church, to propose the possibility of a choice which will require a commitment of their lives. As Jesus with his disciples of Emmaus, so the Church must become today, the traveling companion of young people...

What better place for the Church to become the traveling companion of young people than in the daily life of our Catholic schools. Our Catholic schools provide not only an excellent academic environment, affording students the greatest opportunity to learn and grow, but they are an environment imbued with Catholic culture. They are places of prayer, of respect and of spiritual challenge where the Church travels with our children on their journey toward adulthood. The German immigrants who settled in Marysville, Kansas recognized the importance of Catholic education. The hope is that present-day Catholics will also see the great value of Catholic schools and support them now and in the future.