

# Caledonia's Holy Family parish celebrating 50 years



Holy Family Catholic Church in Caledonia drew together local churches 50 years ago and now is home to 1,100 member families.



A banner created by Holy Family member Molly Fleming marks the parish's 50th anniversary.

## Greg Chandler

Staff Writer

Holy Family Catholic Parish in Caledonia is celebrating its 50th year of ministry this year.

Formed as a merger of several small parishes in 1970, Holy Family now has 1,100 member families.

"This parish has become a growing, vibrant part of our community," Pete Murray, a member of the church's anniversary celebration committee, said.

Establishing the parish was not easy. In the mid-1960s, a priest named Bernard Schafer organized a religious education program that combined children from St. Joseph Catholic Church in Leighton Township, where Schafer was serving, with St. Mary's Catholic Church in Cascade Township and St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Bowne Township. Classes were held at one of the public elementary schools in Caledonia.

In the meantime, St. Mary's and St. Joseph contemplated relocating their churches. That led to discussion on consolidation. They approached the local diocese for approval of a new church in Caledonia. Twice the bishop rejected the idea. But after buyers were found for the two existing church buildings, the bishop approved the creation of Holy Family, and Schafer was assigned to be its pastor.

Later, St. Patrick's Church disbanded after a fire, and its members joined Holy Family, parish manager Deb Hazelbach said.

"The priest that served here also served St. Pat's, but they remained their own parish. Once the church was struck by lightning and burned, they officially joined," Hazelbach said.

The new church was built on a 38-acre site at 9669

Kraft Ave. at a cost of \$275,000. On Christmas Eve 1970, Schafer presided over the first Mass at the parish.

The coronavirus has prevented some of the planned activities the anniversary committee put together, such as a 50th anniversary mass. But the church is remembering the milestone through such measures as a historical booklet, interviews in the newsletter with members who have been part of the parish from its beginnings and a cloth covering the altar that lists the names of all past church members who are now deceased. Banners depicting the church's history hang just outside the sanctuary. Church members will receive a Christmas ornament displaying the church building and featuring its slogan: "Know. Love. Serve."

Among Holy Family's community outreach programs is a blood drive hosted every couple of months for Versiti Blood, formerly Michigan Blood Services. Holy Family and three other nearby churches – St. Paul Lutheran in Caledonia, Gaines Church and Dutton United Reformed – partner on the blood drive, which dates back to 1983, Murray said.

The church also has a number of activities to help those in need, including a food pantry that serves about 70 area families per month, said Molly Fleming, an anniversary committee member who has attended Holy Family since its inception.

During the holidays, the church provides Thanksgiving baskets to 130-150 families and parishioners take part in a Christmas gift outreach.

"We typically have 350 to 400 tags on our tree every year," Fleming said.

Holy Family's outreach



Members of the Holy Family 50th anniversary celebration committee include (from left) Larry Barton, Molly Fleming, Pete Murray and Deb Hazelbach.

throughout its history has not been limited to the Caledonia area. In the 1980s, local farmer John Finkbeiner, with the support of Holy Family, traveled to Africa to provide help to farmers there. The church raised more than \$80,000 to support the project, which included providing a tractor to the African farmers.

"The big thing was to try and help make them self-sufficient and increase their efficiency," Fleming said.

Larry Barton, a lifetime member of Holy Family and another member of the anniversary committee, said Finkbeiner had other challenges to face.

"The big deal was teaching them how to maintain [the tractor]. They didn't

have any idea," Barton said.

In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina decimated the Gulf Coast, more than 50 parish members traveled to Louisiana over a period of six months to rebuild the home of a family the church had adopted. Pete Murray was one of the volunteers.

"We ended up totally gutting this house. Their house was under 8 feet of water," Murray said. "We had to go down and totally rip everything out. Studs was all we left."

"We would send another crew down. These were all parishioners. They would do the electric. They would check on the heat. They did all the internal stuff. Then we'd send another crew down, and they started put-

ting the drywall back up. Then we'd send another crew down and they would paint."

The church later brought the family they had assisted back to Caledonia with them for a celebration Mass.

"It was part of our picnic that year. The Mass was centered on them," Murray said. "There was some gifts given to the kids. They were so grateful. A few of us have stayed in touch with them."

As Holy Family has grown, the building has expanded to meet the growing needs of its members. The most recent addition was in 2006, when a two-story addition was built on the east wing that includes the Holy Family Center, a large fellowship area with a kitchen and walk-in cooler. The \$2.5

million project also included additional classrooms, meeting rooms and an elevator.

The parish currently has six masses weekly – Wednesday through Friday at 9 a.m., Saturdays at 5 p.m. and Sundays at 9 and 11 a.m.

While the sanctuary can seat 635 people, the parish has been allowing only 162 people per mass during the pandemic. People who wish to attend need to sign up in advance online. Every other pew is blocked off with a rope at each end. Strips of tape on the floor every six feet encourage parishioners to practice social distancing while taking communion.

For more information about Holy Family Parish, visit the church website at [hollyfamilycaledonia.org](http://hollyfamilycaledonia.org).