

Holy Spirit Parish at Geist Parish History

The Growth of the Spirit

Since its inception in 1990, Holy Spirit at Geist has been known for its warm, convivial welcoming spirit. Visionary leadership and early parishioners laid a foundation for the spiritual as well as physical growth of the parish by originating a tradition of community, openness and volunteerism that continues to flourish. "Catch the Spirit," the theme of Holy Spirit's first campaign to become a parish, was both appropriate and prophetic.

The evolution of Holy Spirit had its roots in a 1986 Hamilton County growth analysis prepared for the Lafayette Diocese, a study that projected the Catholic population in Fall Creek Township in southeastern Hamilton County would double to 21,081 by the year 2000. New facilities would be needed to serve the influx of Catholics.

In July of 1990, a storefront office was opened for the parish-to-be in a strip center between an animal hospital and an insurance agency on 96th St. In September of 1990, the first public Mass was celebrated in the Fall Creek Elementary School gymnasium at 12131 Olio Road for a congregation of ten. In October, after Bishop William Higi officially approved the name, Holy Spirit at Geist, the first parish member was officially registered. By December of 1990, religious education classes had begun for more than 40 children, and a standing-room-only congregation packed the gym to watch the children participate in the Christmas liturgy. By May of 1991, the 100th family had registered.

By August of 1992, Holy Spirit had increased its membership to 230 families. The parish had also engaged 100 parishioners in Mass ministries, instituted live music at all Masses, enrolled 71 adult participants in RENEW and Bible study programs, involved 15 parish sponsors and candidates in its RCIA program and initiated six new Catholics. Over 50 children were involved in seasonal liturgies, and 147 youth were enrolled in religious-education classes taught by 14 instructors and 11 aides in 12 homes.

Outreach programs held seasonal and monthly food/clothing drives for the needy. A budget and fiscal projections for parish development were prepared. The parish held three parish-wide social events and served 7,200 donut holes after Sunday Masses.

Spirited services in the gymnasium continued, but Holy Spirit was actively looking for a home. With the help of a loan from the diocese, the parish was able to purchase a 30-acre tract of land along Fall Creek Road for \$450,000. In March of 1993, Bishop Higi presided at the groundbreaking for a new church!

Holy Spirit's 31,000 square foot church building, built by Myler Church Building Systems of Crawfordsville, was completed \$200,000 under the \$3.3 million budget and three months ahead of the 17-month construction schedule-thanks to thousands of volunteer hours. The main worship space, which could accommodate over 900 parishioners, featured a sanctuary highlighted by a stained glass mural of a dove flying over a lake at sunrise-evoking the spirit of the parish. The building included a chapel, a Social Hall with a commercial kitchen, a library, an education wing with 13 classrooms and a suite of administrative and religious education offices. The grounds included two ponds with fountains plus a large central fountain at the main entrance-appropriate because of Holy Spirit's water-themed design. Stained glass windows in the sanctuary depicted water stories from the Old and New Testaments, and blue tones predominated in the windows and carpets. Names of those who had contributed to the building fund or memorials were inscribed on a Dove Tree of Life.

The first Mass was celebrated in the new facility on Saturday, August 13, 1994. Over 2000 parishioners joined together to sing "We will build the city of God". Twelve new parishioners were baptized that first weekend in our beautiful new church.

On Sunday, October 9, 1994, Bishop Higi officially dedicated Holy Spirit as the newest parish in the Diocese of Lafayette. Holy Spirit's choir sang a special Dedication celebrating the community spirit of our parish. The refrain aptly described the congregation: "We're the people of Holy Spirit; we are the Body of Christ. We give of our time and our talent and treasure; we are a household of faith."

During 1994 many of the programs, groups and traditions of Holy Spirit were established. These included:

- Holy Spirit's first Parish Council was established.
- Publication of the Paraclete newsletter began.
- Monthly coffees and visits welcomed new members.
- First Appreciation Dinner for Volunteers was held on April 29.
- In May, 26 young people received the sacrament of Confirmation.
- In August, thirty-six children received First Eucharist; the second Ministry Fair was held in the new Social Hall; Children's Liturgy of the Word and the Co-op Nursery started.
- RCIA also began in August, and thirteen RCIA candidates joined the church at the Easter Vigil.

- The first Religious Education classes in the new building, held in September, were attended by 50 students in pre-school and kindergarten, 200 in grades 1-8 and 45 in the teen youth group.
- First Parish Picnic, at Ft. Benjamin Harrison, was held September 11.
- Small Faith community groups began.
- Men's, Women's and Singles' Clubs were started. The Men's Club had its first Pancake Breakfast and sponsored a New Year's Eve party for 225 parishioners who rang in 1995 in the Social Hall.

Community outreach has always been a priority for Holy Spirit. In 1994, parishioners provided toys and money for monthly birthday parties at Dayspring Homeless Shelter. Outreach volunteers transported over 250 cases of food to Dayspring and the Red Cross Pantry. Kits filled with toiletries were provided to rape victims, and clothing was collected for the poor. The tradition of Thanksgiving baskets was begun, and 56 plants were donated to the retired Sisters of St. Joseph.

By 1995, Holy Spirit had 1,000 families. The parish operated an ever-growing number of ministries, staffed by many volunteers. Some of the firsts for the year included:

- First Evening Bible Study.
- First garage sale on Sept. 23, 1995.
- First by-laws approved by the Parish Council.
- Youth and recreational sports teams began in the summer.
- First Potluck Dinners, a family function that enabled neighbors to meet and enjoy each other's company began in June.

The fall of 1995 saw the beginning of Holy Spirit's first major capital campaign, Let Our Spirit Soar, initiated to reduce the interest-bearing debt on the church mortgage. This campaign, like so many others, originated with a volunteer group of parishioners. It was based on shared sacrifice, prayer and dreams, with the goal of expanding opportunities, ministries and programs by reducing debt. The campaign was assisted by a professional consultant from Resource Service Inc. in Dallas, TX—but more importantly, by hundreds of volunteers. A number of parish leaders made advance commitments; other made three-year commitments at a parish banquet on November 12 at the Westin Hotel. Others responded to mailings asking for “not equal gifts, but equal sacrifices.” The first capital campaign was a success, and the \$2.8 million church mortgage was paid off in December of 1998.

Highlights of 1996 included:

In April, the parish bought an adjacent 20 acres of land on its southwest side for future growth;

- First at-large Parish Council elections were held.
- In the summer, Olan Mills took photos for Holy Spirit's first Pictorial Directory;
- First CRHP retreats were held on Oct. 25-27 (men) and Nov. 15-17 (women).
- Volunteers started Holy Spirit's first Internet site, hosted by IQuest.
- A Planning Committee laid the ground for Holy Spirit's first Parish Survey.
- First Annual Polka Mass was a major success.
- New Breaking Bread music books and a grand piano were purchased.

Building and Grounds supervised the expansion of the parking lot and gathering area and added new volleyball courts, a new entrance sign and wallpaper in the hallways.

Religious Education showed enrollments of 806 in 1996, compared to 553 in 1995. Youth group enrollment increased 40% to 128 students. Families increased to 1,620 from 1,317; and average weekly mass attendance increased to 2,300. Sacraments included 260 baptisms, 99 First Communions, 48 confirmations and 57 marriages.

That summer, 800 individuals responded to the first Holy Spirit survey, administered and tabulated by Walker Information. Five priority areas identified by the survey were:

Adult Spiritual Development Volunteerism

Expanded Youth Programs

Pre-School

School

The Parish Council established an adult spiritual development committee and a youth committee to develop goals for their areas. The Council also held its first listening session to discuss needs versus wants with parishioners, and it approved two new ministries, GHoST Theater and the Stephen Ministry.

By the end of 1998, it was clear that Holy Spirit needed additional space. Religious Education had 950 children in K-8 & used all available space for their classes. The Social Hall held 175 people, scarcely adequate for a parish of over 5,000 people. There were no athletic facilities, and CYO teams had trouble finding space to rent. More space was also needed so that new ministries, programs, retreats and seminars could be developed.

To solve the space problem, the Parish Council approved plans for a multipurpose facility that would be able to seat 500 people and serve the parish's other needs as well. Final approval from the Lafayette diocese for the new Parish Life Center was received in early February. An all-parish banquet was held on May 2 to kick off a capital campaign titled "Parish Life Soaring Higher." Groundbreaking occurred on June 1, 1999, and construction began immediately on the 32,000 square foot facility. The new building would be approximately the same size as the church, but configured differently. It included a multi-purpose gymnasium, eight classrooms, six offices, workroom, storage space, a commercial kitchen, dressing rooms/lockers, showers and a stage with a professional lighting & sound system. Other building continued during the year: 3,000 feet of shadow box fence was installed on the property's east and north boundaries and additional evergreen trees were planted. The maintenance building was expanded, and Holy Spirit signed a 5-year contract extension with Neighborhood Patrol for use of the house at the Fall Creek Road entrance.

The GHoST Theatre group put on their first original production to a large appreciative audience in the Social Hall, and a new health ministry was added.

Once again, construction was completed ahead of schedule, and Bishop Higi dedicated the \$3.8 million Parish Life Center on April 30, 2000.

By the end of 2000, Holy Spirit had approx. 1700 registered families using 62,000 square feet of facilities. There were 250 teens in Life Teen and 850 children in pre-K-8 religious education classes. There had been 250 infants baptized, 70 RCIA candidates, 183 first Communion, 146 confirmations and 70 weddings.

By the end of 2001, the parish had paid off its bank debt completely!

Holy Spirit continues to expand. Our growth in registered households is exceeded only by our growth in ministries. Adult programs such as Bible Study, RENEW, Cursillo, CRHP, Sponsor Couples, Stephen Ministry and RCIA are at the core of this spiritual growth with over 1,300 parishioners participating in 2001. Over 1,600 youth participated in Religious Education programs last year. Parish facilities have doubled to a total of 62,000 square feet with the addition of the Parish Life Center, and expansion of the worship space this year will add 450 new seats for parishioners, as well as 30 for the choir this year.

Last year, the Community Vision Committee began gathering input to review Holy Spirit's progress since the first survey in 1996. Over 59% of parishioners responded to the second survey, again sent out and analyzed by Walker Information. Again, the Parish Council will review the results and together with the priests, staff and ministries, develop a strategic plan for the parish.

One conclusion is already evident from the survey: Holy Spirit's tradition of community, openness and volunteerism continues to flourish. The parish today encompasses over 7,000 parishioners who "caught the spirit" and continue to share it with others.