



CMC Celebrates 10 years under Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish

Ten years ago, Msgr. Ken Fiedler of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish had “keys to an empty building, no money, and no staff” after he boldly decided to take on the task of operating the Catholic Multicultural Center (CMC) when the Diocese of Madison shut it down due to budget concerns. On August 3rd 2009 the CMC re-opened under Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish with a budget of \$250,000, a staff of four, and a handful of community programs including a free meal 3 times a week.

CMC Director Andy Russell said he was nervous when the CMC re-opened. “Can we really keep this going? I not only want to be able to keep it going, but to grow it substantially.”

Today, the CMC serves people in need with a budget of 1.7 million, 16 permanent staff positions, and roughly three times the amount of programming, including Dane County’s only free community meal served all seven days of the week. The CMC is celebrating these accomplishments by looking back at the moments ten years ago that enabled this success.

“When I got the news that the CMC was closing, it felt like a loved one just died; I felt numb,” said Russell. Service Coordinator Antonio Quintanilla said when he heard the news, he couldn’t accept that the Center could close for good. “I was just thinking, God will provide, I will wait and see what happens.”

Meanwhile, Msgr. Fiedler was shocked to hear about the CMC’s closing while watching the 5 o’clock news. He was familiar with the CMC because Queen of Peace had been collecting food for the CMC pantry for many years and because the Parish had become quite involved with the campaign to build the new CMC in 2002.

On Pentecost Sunday, a couple days after the closing, Msgr. Fiedler was sitting in his backyard, upset about the news of the closing. He began praying for the CMC, and then he very clearly heard a voice say to him, “Why don’t you just do it?” with “it” being to have his Parish take on operation of the CMC.

“I wanted to not only help facilitate the reopening but to run it. Because helping the poor is in our blood as Roman Catholics following the Gospel,” explained Msgr. Fiedler.

So he contacted the Vicar General, and a mere one and a half days later, Msgr. Fiedler had a press release written by the Diocese explaining the official transfer of the CMC’s operations to Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, not only to re-open the Center, but to take on responsibility of

running it. Step one was to hire back the four staff members who has been working at the CMC when it closed: Director Andy Russell, Steve Maurice, Antonio Quintanilla, and Lilliam Post.

"If the original four hadn't come back, we might not have pulled this off. I am very grateful for them and for the trust they put in me and in Queen of Peace," said Msgr. Fiedler. Step two was to get donations to fund the operation of the Center. By the end of the day when the public announcement was made that Our Lady Queen of Peace was taking on the CMC, Msgr. Fiedler had a slew of e-mails and voicemails offering to help with this endeavor, including pledges in donations totaling \$30,000.



"The key to me was how generous people were in sharing their prayers, financial support, and volunteering their time. To me, this speaks to the goodness of the people in Madison," said Msgr. Fiedler, adding that, "CMC started as a grassroots effort, and I wanted to keep it grassroots, where all parishes had some responsibility in running it."

While Msgr. Ken and community supporters worked on laying the groundwork for the CMC to re-open, staff kept the mission of the CMC alive even while its doors were closed. Quintanilla and his wife continued accepting the food collection from Queen of Peace, running a food pantry out of their front porch. Maurice operated the meal program out of St. Mark's Lutheran Church. Then, one day they heard from Msgr. Fiedler, whom they had never met, offering them their job back. "He was very encouraging," said Quintanilla. "He believed in the decision he made, in the parishioners, and had trust in God that this was going to be a good thing for the people."

Just two months after closing, the groundwork had been put in place to allow the Center's doors to re-open. This day the CMC offered its usual evening meal, the media came to cover the occasion, and supporters and beneficiaries alike were excited to see the CMC up and running again.

"The main goal was to ensure that everything we did was sustainable," said Russell. Shortly after re-opening, the CMC expanded its meal program from three to five days a week, then to seven days. Groups from Queen of Peace Parish were a big part of making that happen, said Russell. A total of five QP groups provide, prepare, and serve the meal one weekend day a month, one of them led by Msgr. Fiedler himself. "I like serving the meal so I can visit with everybody. It's important to treat [meal program attendees] like our guests. They are part of God's family and they should be made welcome," said Msgr. Fiedler.

As the CMC rallied more support and resources, it steadily expanded, quickly surpassing the services it had previously offered before closing. A couple years after the re-opening, Culinary Creations Catering job training enterprise was born, with Queen of Peace being the first customer. QP asked the CMC to cater all their funeral luncheons and later its school lunch program, becoming the first of four schools the enterprise now caters for. Around the same time, a low-cost immigration legal services program was created due to high demand in the community. The food pantry quickly expanded from once a week to twice a week. First the pantry served families twice a month, and then a few years later it expanded again to allow families to come once a week. A community environmental program was added so that CMC could live the social teaching of Caring for Creation and take steps protect the low-income and minority populations it serves from disproportionate negative environmental impacts.

"[The CMC] continues to grow through the generosity of people responding to the need of those hurting in our community," commented Msgr. Fiedler. Russell added, "Queen of Peace has been crucial to our success, but so are a lot of other organizations that have helped us. We wouldn't be here today doing what we're doing if not for everyone's support."

Looking back on the ten years that led the CMC from being a vacant building to becoming a bigger, stronger, more effective organization serving more people in need than ever before, Russell said, "[For the future,] we hope to continue to see it grow and flourish to help our brothers and sisters in need even more." Msgr. Fiedler echoed these thoughts, explaining, "I want us to continue a strong financial base so we can increase all ministries depending on the needs of our community, especially immigration services and also job training. I want us to treat everyone with dignity in a very hostile world. We have to be a beacon of welcome to everyone." He also added that he wants to continue see the whole community be involved in the operation and success of the CMC, for it's not just up to Queen of Peace. "I hope it continues to be grassroots supported, as it began in 1946 [when CMC was founded] and has been since then. That's the only way this will continue to work."

