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Catholic Multicultural Center Celebrates 10 years under Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish

By Laura Green

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.”

On Pentecost Sunday, a couple days after the closing, Msgr. Fiedler was sitting in his backyard, upset about the news of the closing. 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 building in 2002. 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 the keys to the CMC and a press release written by the Diocese explaining the official transfer of the CMC’s operations to Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, who would take on responsibility of running the Center. 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 just over the span of a few hours.

“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. After two months, these programs were able to resume operation within the walls of the CMC when the Center’s doors re-opened.



On the day of the big re-opening, 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. Hopes were running high, but the closing was still fresh in everyone’s minds. “The main goal was to ensure that everything we did was sustainable,” said Russell.

Not only did CMC sustain the programs of the past, it greatly expanded its offerings. Shortly after re-opening, the CMC expanded its meal program from three to five days a week, then to seven days. Msgr. Fielder himself began to lead one of five Queen of Peace Parish groups to serve the meal once a month. “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.

The meal program wasn’t the only way the CMC’s services to the community expanded. A couple years after the re-opening, Culinary Creations Catering job training enterprise was born, with Queen of Peace being the first customer, asking the CMC to cater all their funeral luncheons. Later QP became 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. A few years later the expanded again, doubling the number of visits families were allowed to make in a month. 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.

Reflecting on this incredible growth that followed the closing and re-opening, Russell explained, “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 took the CMC from being a vacant building to becoming a bigger, stronger, and more effective organization in serving people in need, 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, adding that 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.”

