

Parish Self-Assessment Report We Walk by Faith

St. Gerard Catholic Church
809 Orange Avenue NW
Roanoke, VA 24016
Fr. René Castillo, Pastor

September 10, 2008

I. Introduction

VISION STATEMENT

A model Christian parish where each individual contributes unique gifts and talents to create a prayerful, caring and inclusive community.

HISTORY

In August 1946, Redemptorist Bishop Peter L. Ireton, seeing a need to serve the spiritual needs of Roanoke's African-American Catholic community, appointed Fr. Maurice McDonald to establish a Roman Catholic mission to serve the black population in the city of Roanoke. In September 1946, he established that mission and assigned Redemptorist Father Maurice McDonald as its first Pastor. Within a few weeks, Father McDonald celebrated his first Mass and preached his first sermon at Harrison School with seventeen people in attendance – nine adults and eight children. On October 16th of that year the Redemptorists' Provincial approved the purchase of a nearby building at 835 Moorman Road. Bishop Ireton named the parish after St. Gerard, the patron saint of mothers and the poor, whose feast day coincides with that day. Thus, St. Gerard became the first and only black Catholic parish in southwest Virginia.

In 1951, the priest and the people worked together to build a rectory and church facility at 809 Orange Avenue, NW, the church's present address. In July 1953, Fr. McDonald left St Gerard Parish, which had seventeen families at that time. In October 1974, the Redemptorists were withdrawn from St. Gerard Church when it was made a diocesan parish; Rev. Michael S. Schmied was assigned as the first diocesan priest to serve the parish.

In May 1977, thirty-one years after the founding of St. Gerard Catholic Church, Rev. Walter C. Barrett became the first African-American pastor of the black Catholic parish in Roanoke. From 1977 to 1984, the number of families grew from 96 to 133, and for the first time included twenty Euro-American families. On April 8, 1984, under Father Barrett's leadership, St. Gerard dedicated a renovated and expanded worship center. Since then, St. Gerard has been pastored by priests

who reflect the diversity that is prevalent at St. Gerard – three black priests, three white priests, and a Filipino priest.

In June of 1996, Mass was celebrated in Spanish for the first time for our new Hispanic parishioners. Bishop Walter Sullivan celebrated a bilingual Mass for St. Gerard's 50th anniversary on October 13, 1996, which culminated three days of celebration with the theme of "We've Come This Far By Faith". Father Wayne Ball was pastor during this period, and the parish served about 175 families. Bishop Francis DiLorenzo celebrated a bilingual Mass for St. Gerard's 60th anniversary on October 15, 2006, which culminated three days of celebration with the theme of "A House of Prayer For All People". Events were planned to showcase the diverse heritages of the people who make up St. Gerard. Father Rene Castillo was Pastor at the time, and the parish had about 350 families comprised of African, African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian and other ethnic backgrounds.

In The Catholic Virginian of October 2, 1996, Bishop Walter Sullivan wrote a reflection about St. Gerard, which said: "Yours was a humble beginning... you have a proud history...one of struggle and sacrifice... one of faith and the future... you always believed in yourself... you have come this far by faith... you are a very important sign of what we are to be... I encourage you to keep walking and tell your story."

WORSHIP

At present, the worship space seats about 250 people at Mass. Three liturgies are celebrated every Sunday, each planned to accommodate the spiritual needs of a diverse population, as well as involve parishioners in liturgical ministry. The 9:30 A.M. Mass is in English, with liturgical music alternating Sundays between a children's choir, an adult gospel choir, an ensemble choir, and psalm leaders/solo musicians. The 12:15 Mass is in Spanish, with music provided weekly by a Spanish choir. The 5:00 P.M. Mass is in English, with music provided by a small group of volunteers. This Mass is truly at the service of the Roanoke Valley. It is the only Sunday evening Mass in the valley on Sundays. A good number of people attend who are not parishioners, and they come for various reasons. On holy days there is a bilingual Mass in the evening; on weekdays Mass is celebrated in English, except Tuesdays and Saturdays.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In September 1946, St. Gerard Parish became a reality with Fr. Maurice McDonald celebrating Mass; seventeen people were in attendance – nine adults and eight children. When Fr. McDonald left in July 1953, the Parish was serving 17 families: 17 men, 27 women, and 45 children. From 1977 to 1984, the number of families continued to grow from 96 to 133 and, for the

first time, included twenty white families. At the 50th anniversary in October 1996, Fr. Wayne Ball pastored 175 families. At the 60th anniversary in October 2006, the parish boasted a multicultural presence unparalleled among the Roanoke Valley Catholic parishes, especially as a result of our growing Hispanic population. At that time, St. Gerard had a registration of 843 and was about 50% Hispanic; 25% Caucasian; and 25% African-American, African, and Asian. Father René Castillo, the present pastor, is originally from the Philippines.

The parish census just completed in June 2008 showed that St. Gerard's registry had 995 people, which included about 30% men, about 40% women, and about 30% children. The largest percentage of ages occurred at 31-59 years of age. About 50% of the men were ages 31-59, and about 45% of the women were between those ages. About 50% of the children were ages 6-12. The registry reflects 396 households. St. Gerard Parish is now about 57% Hispanic, about 20% Caucasian, about 19% African-American, and about 4% African, Asian, or other. A large group of citizens of Burundi have just become part of the parish.

In April 1984, then Fr. Walter Barrett, now Monsignor, said it best, "...we are the most racially mixed Catholic community in the Roanoke Valley. It speaks for our catholicity."

II. Word

Strengths (Please list some of the strengths of the parish concerning Christian formation [children, youth, and adult] and the presentation of the teachings of the Church)

- We have religious education and sacramental preparation that cater to different languages, different cultures and different education backgrounds.
- The Sunday homilies are thoughtfully prepared and well-delivered.
- The parish challenges its members to be active disciples through the pulpit, announcements, the bulletin, and varied service groups.

Needs (Please indicate areas under the category of Word that need strengthening)

- We need a parish website.
- Our resources are limited. We should have a small selection of reading material and have a sign that states additional resources available at St. Andrews, Roanoke Catholic School and Catholic Historical Society.
- We need an expanded and organized library.
- We need more classrooms. The accessibility of the classrooms needs to be reviewed.

III. Worship

Strengths (Please list some of the strengths of the parish concerning Worship and the celebration of the Sacraments)

- The parish involves everyone to participate in the liturgy (different age groups, different ethnicities and cultures).
- The diversity of the music makes everyone feel welcome.
- The continuous invitation of parishioners to join the different ministries in the church by sharing their gifts and talents.
- The accessibility of parishioners with wheelchair, crutches and other mobility aids.
- The communication of the staff to the parishioners about up coming events and things that are taking place around our diocese.

Needs (Please indicate areas under the category of Worship that need strengthening)

- We need the Liturgy of the Word for children.
- The Sacrament of Reconciliation needs to be scheduled more often.
- We need to make a greater effort to enhance multicultural understanding through the different liturgical customs and traditions.

IV. Community

Strengths (Please list some of the strengths of the parish concerning community and fellowship)

- We feed and clothe the needy: support St. Francis House, RAM, Rescue Mission, Refugee and Immigration Service, Good Samaritan Fund, clothing drives, and Thanksgiving baskets.
- We support pastoral ministries such as visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, sheltering AA and NA at parish facilities, support local youth centers, visiting veterans and assisting with ESL. Parish community activities include Posada, picnics, and Mardi Gras.
- Advocating for Catholic values: participate in Gift of Life, Pro-Life, transportation provided for refugees and shut-ins. Choir ministry monthly at the Rescue Mission.

Needs (Please indicate areas under the category of Community that need strengthening)

- Social space is very limited. Need a community fellowship center.
- Sharing activities from the different cultural groups.
- Establish a website.
- Closer integration of our multicultural community.
- Create or foster a leading role in assisting alcoholics and other addicts.

- Establishing a youth coordinator for our parish.

V. Service

Strengths (Please list some of the strengths of the parish concerning Service to others)

- Always welcoming new parishioners and new immigrants and trying to help them in their sacramental and religious formation needs.
- Charitable endeavors: Operation Rice Bowl, Angel Tree, and Thanksgiving food drive.
- The parish facilities are available for community groups like NA and English classes.
- Refugee support – material, spiritual and educational.

Needs (Please indicate areas under the category of Service that need strengthening)

- Increase parishioner's involvement through communication for better coordination and service.
- We need to prepare children, youth and adult groups to assist the community.
- We need to develop expertise in assisting people who need to access available community resources.

VI. Plans for renewal and meeting parish needs

For the next year (Please indicate what specific plans the parish has in addressing its more immediate needs / areas that need strengthening)

1. Establish a parish website.
2. Establish a volunteer youth minister to formulate a youth-oriented, Catholic value youth program for our parish, and fund it.
3. Form a study group to investigate and determine the current space needs and future needs of our parish.
4. Organize library for the parish.

For the next five years (Please indicate what plans the parish has in addressing its needs / areas that need strengthening in the next five years)

1. Feasibility of expansion of the church either at the present location or a new location, for our growing spiritual and educational needs.
2. Renovate the rectory and pay off the debt.
3. Developing expertise in growing the spiritual and material services provided by our parish for refugees and immigrants.

VII. Diocesan Support

What diocesan support does the parish need to meet its stated needs.

1. Assist and help establish, improve and/or design our parish website.
2. Assist and establish a vibrant youth ministry program at St. Gerard.
3. Diocesan guidance in determining our parish building plans.
4. Create local programs that provide leadership training to adults and young adults of different ethnic backgrounds.

VIII. Conclusion

We strive to be a house of prayer for all people. We need to expand our ministries and facilities appropriately. It is essential that we support adult formation, sacraments, catechism and leadership.