

One Church can make parish center renovation possible

written by Malea Hargett |





Catechists Carolina Cano, Cynthia Solis and Jenny Calvario tour one of the classrooms used by first Communion and confirmation classes at St. Andrew Church in Danville. (Malea Hargett photo)



Father Mauricio Carrasco talks with faith formation leaders Aug. 26 about the renovations needed for St. Francis Parish Center to be more functional. (Malea Hargett photo)



Youth from St. Andrew Church and the Danville community compete in a soccer tournament during the annual parish festival fundraiser at a city park Aug. 14. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



St. Andrew parishioner Benita Castro cooks meat for ricos tacos de asada y huaraches al pastor during the annual parish festival fundraiser at the city park in Danville Aug. 14. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



Father Mauricio Carrasco smiles with parishioner Arturo Andraca during the St. Andrew parish festival at the Danville city park Aug. 14. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



A local man makes balloon animals for youth attending the annual parish festival fundraiser for St. Andrew in Danville Aug. 14. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



Youth show off their soccer medals after a tournament at St. Andrew Church's annual parish festival Aug. 14 in Danville. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



Yolanda Hernandez (left), Valentina Patricio, Leticia Camacho and Vicky Herrera, parishioners of St. Andrew in Danville, work with masa dough during the annual parish festival, cooking authentic Latin American food for sale Aug. 14. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)



St. Andrew parishioners Cristal Ponce, Abigail Garcia and Alondra Ponce smile at the T-shirt table during the annual parish festival Aug. 14 at the Danville city park. (Aprille Hanson Spivey photo)

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DANVILLE — For the past 15 years, the Catholic community in Danville has grown.

It started when the first church, St. Andrew, was built and dedicated in 2006.

With the 320-seat church full at Sunday Mass and no place for parish events or religious education classes, the parish bought the former executive offices of Petit Jean Poultry in 2013 for \$150,000. The 6.5 acres, including a storage-garage building, sits across from the church on Highway 10.

One Church, the diocesan initiative to give a rural or mission church a one-time financial boost, will partner with St. Andrew Church from September 2021 to August 2022. The church hopes to renovate St. Francis Parish Center to hold youth and adult faith formation and parish events with One Church funding.

St. Andrew finally had some space for parish events and classrooms for religious education, and they were even able to host young adult and charismatic retreats. Unfortunately, much of the two-story, 7,850-square-foot building is unusable.

One Church, the diocesan initiative to give a rural or mission church a one-time financial boost, will partner with St. Andrew Church from September 2021 to August 2022. The church hopes to renovate St. Francis Parish Center to hold youth and adult faith formation and parish events with One Church funding. The center was named after St. Francis of Assisi by a former pastor.

The parish building has some unique features that have been challenging for the minor renovations the parish has been able to make so far. The executive offices included an outdoor pool and indoor sauna and hot tub that had to be removed. Small offices were turned into classrooms that can't fit many students. Bathrooms still can hold only one person and have showers and bathtubs that are not needed.

"This building had a fountain out front," pastor Father Mauricio Carrasco said. "It was meant to look majestic. We want the building to be easier to maintain, and ideally we have more parking there."

With few usable rooms, religious education classes for pre-kindergarten to fifth grade and sixth to 12th grades are split into two groups, serving 80 children.

"We have nine classrooms between the top and bottom floors," Father Carrasco said. "The bottom floor is a ballroom. It's a really odd space. Maybe we have 10 spaces for teaching classes."

The two kitchens in the building are small and in disrepair, unable to serve parish-wide events.

Father Carrasco said he knows the church will need support from Catholics across the Diocese of Little Rock to renovate St. Francis Parish Center into a functional parish hall and faith formation building.

"It's a feasible space because we have made it work," the pastor said. "But we are at a crossroads right now ... We met as a parish and talked about this extensively. Do we want to keep that building and move forward, turning it into a commercial building? Right now, it is really more of a house. Do we want to make renovations to it that will slowly turn it into a parish center? Or do we want to get rid of it and figure out what we're going to build somewhere else? ... The parish decided we should keep St. Francis Center."

Father Carrasco said he is now working with the Diocese of Little Rock to hire an architect and figure out how much it would cost to renovate the bathrooms, remove one kitchen, renovate the other kitchen and remove some walls to make larger classrooms.

Secretary and bookkeeper Jenny Calvario said the church doesn't have much savings. Collections at Mass go to pay the parish's building loan. Father Carrasco said the church was significantly impacted during the pandemic because all donations are made during Mass, not automatic bank drafts like larger parishes arrange.

"COVID hit us pretty hard," the pastor said. "We weren't able to meet for Mass, and we didn't have any money coming in. Physical presence is very important for tithing here."

Extreme cold weather in February caused pipes to burst in the church and St. Francis Parish Center, damaging the floors.

The small community couldn't host its festival in 2020 but organized one this year at the county fairgrounds Aug. 14, raising \$30,000, boosted by its first-ever rodeo.

With no festival in 2020 and fewer people attending Masses, Father Carrasco said, "We weren't able to pay our bills. Thankfully, the diocese was helpful, but we still owe money for the loan."

Parishioners are doing what they can to raise money for their renovation.

“The ladies gather and make tamales and sell them at the chicken plant,” Cynthia Solis, former faith formation director, said.

The pastor added, “They stay up all night to get everything ready and at 5 in the morning, they go before the shift ends and sell them at the plant, especially on Fridays.”

“They sell like hot tamales,” he said with a laugh.

After Sunday Mass, tacos, corn on the cob and frozen treats are made and sold.

Father Carrasco said the parish must have support from One Church to make the necessary renovations to St. Francis Parish Center.

“We definitely can’t do anything without One Church,” he said.

For more information or to make a donation once or in monthly installments, visit dolr.org/one-church.