

SPRING 2024

Generous Hearts

Love &
Charity

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ANNOUNCING THE
LIGHT OF CHRIST LEGACY SOCIETY

A publication brought to you by



**CATHOLIC
FOUNDATION**
of West Michigan



This year's themed content is accompanied by a unique icon that represents the virtues of love and charity. When you see this icon, you'll know that the story is part of the "Love & Charity" series of messages.

Our 2024 theme, "Love & Charity," is the source from which all good deeds are undertaken. Recognized as the greatest of virtues, they reflect God's love for humanity and the love that Christians are called to emulate.

Each Catholic Foundation gift, project, and event is made possible through generous people revealing their love for God and neighbors through charitable endeavors. As you explore the many ways in which our theme takes shape this year, we encourage you to consider how love and charity may deepen in your heart and impact our community according to Christ's teachings.

"And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father."

Colossians 3:17



From the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

I am excited to introduce our new annual theme, "Love & Charity," a profound reflection of our Catholic values and mission. Rooted in the teachings of Christ, this theme calls us to embody love and charity in our daily endeavors.

At the Catholic Foundation, we recognize that love is the greatest of virtues, and charity is the outward demonstration of this love in action that seeks the well-being of others. The Catholic tradition draws upon biblical teachings and theological reflections to emphasize the unity between love and charity – with God as their ultimate object.

As the heartbeat of our faith and its outward expression, love and charity are foundational to our mission and encapsulate the essence of Christian life. It is a joy to see the tangible manifestation of our donors' charity through acts of generosity that positively impact people in our community.

Through this theme, we are reminded of the spiritual nature of our work and remain so very grateful to those who support it. We thank you for embracing this sacred calling and impacting the lives of those we are blessed to serve.

Please enjoy this issue of *Generous Hearts*. We are grateful for your faithful support.

Yours in Christ,

Greg Deja
Executive Director

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- Most Rev. David J. Walkowiak
- Rev. Msgr. William H. Duncan
- Michael Lown
- Donald Duba
- Mary Lehman-Panek

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- Erinn Hill**
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Mission

We inspire and enable generous support for parishes and ministries rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church to make a lasting impact in our communities and the lives of others.

Funding Priorities

- Sharing Our Catholic Faith
- Educating Children & Young Adults
- Supporting Religious Vocations
- Helping the Poor & Vulnerable
- Caring for Creation

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FAITH, FAMILY, *and* SERVICE

Strong Role Models Shape Ken's Journey

Anyone raised in the Catholic Church would have learned early on that each of us is, "A light of the world." But few, perhaps, have taken that lesson to heart as much as Ken Boerma. The former altar boy and Eagle Scout credits strong role models at St. Mary's Church and School in Spring Lake with helping him to grow into a man able to inspire others — and who will continue to do so for years to come through a charitable legacy.

In a recent interview, Ken was eager to describe faith's role in his life. Smiling and proudly wearing an Air Force baseball cap as he sat down with staff from the Catholic Foundation of West Michigan, he told stories of his first experiences in the Church, his service in the Armed Forces, and his children. His son sat beside him to fill in details occasionally, but, at 92 years old, his

memories were clear and illustrative. Their rapport is tender, affectionate, and a fitting representation of their family's strong connections and supportive bonds.

Formation at an Early Age

Ken discovered his own light through the inspiring example of others, and that began at home. His parents came from two different faith backgrounds, but their shared Christian values provided a key foundation for the young Boerma. Through his parents' character and conduct, and in their devotion to each other (which included Ken's father converting to Catholicism to honor his mother's wish), Ken saw the power of faith and commitment.

He became an altar boy, intrigued by miracles and drawn in particular to Mary, the Mother of God, and to her transcendent stories, in which he found

inspiration and solace. His relationships with the priests at his parish home were instrumental, he says, in shaping his spiritual journey as a young man.

As role models, he explains, they provided guidance and support during his formative years and ultimately had a profound impact on his unwavering dedication to the Catholic Church and its teachings. Also, in his young life, Ken embarked upon what would be a lifetime of service in the Boy Scouts. Here, too, he found strong role models who helped to form his character.

All of these moments shaped his first steps into adulthood — getting married to his first wife, Donna, in 1951, and then, just 12 days later, he reported for duty and was deployed overseas with the United States Air Force.

The early years weren't easy; Ken was far from home and traveling the world in the military, yet his commitment to faith and family remained his top priority. Though he wasn't earning much, he continued to send pledges to St. Mary's and support Donna while he was overseas.

Faith-filled Family

Like so many, Ken's legacy is first identified through his family. A father of four, grandfather of nine, and great-grandfather of 15, Ken knows he's blessed. Though he does not put himself at the top of the family hierarchy. With great admiration and respect, Ken credits that position to Father Tony Vainavicz, a diocesan priest and longtime pastor of St. Mary's Parish in Spring Lake.

For Ken and his family, life has been filled with joy, yet it has not been without heartache. Nearly 50 years ago, Ken's son Mike passed away on Thanksgiving Day. And after a long battle with cancer, Donna passed in 1999. Ken's faith, always strong, sustained him through these tough times.



Ken and Barbara



Ken's 90th birthday with his grandchildren

Of Mike's passing, Ken says, "I figured God needs him worse than I do."

As for Donna's death, Ken found comfort in the relationships he'd built through St. Mary's, and particularly the bond he'd forged with Father Tony. Ken shares that Father Tony was there for so many important milestones in his life, from his first wife's funeral to presiding over his second marriage.

The Holy Spirit continues to work through the special relationship between Ken and Father Tony. It just so happens that Father Tony started the St. Mary's School endowment back in 1992, which ultimately inspired Ken to arrange a legacy gift to the school when his earthly duties are complete — just part of his impact as a light to future generations.

Ken's commitment to his faith remained a key part of his life through moments of joy and sorrow. Through his regular attendance at Mass, Ken met his second wife, Barbara, and the two were later married — by Father Tony.

A Heart of Generosity

Ken and Barbara shared a love of St. Mary's, a commitment to faith, and a love of family. Sadly, Ken lost Barbara in 2023. However, their shared commitment to their community is manifested in their legacy with St. Mary's Church and School, the top priority of their charitable intentions. Ken is delighted he can share his blessings with a strong endowment that supports the school's financial viability for future generations of students.

Inspired by wonderful role models dating back to his youth, Ken Boerma grew into the kind of man who inspires others — and who continues to inspire them as a light of this world. Reflecting on his life, this man who's done so much for so many through his faithful and generous stewardship, makes a pointed observation about creating opportunities for the next generation:

"Catholic education is so needed right now," he says, "and I know this is going to help some little kids get a good Catholic education." Anyway, he jokes, "You can't take it with you. And it's going to make a lot of happy kids."



Investing in the School's Future

Endowment Matching Campaign for St. Mary's, Spring Lake

On January 29, at the onset of National Catholic Schools Week, Father Bill Vander Werff, pastor of St. Mary's Church and School in Spring Lake, had a special announcement: a generous and anonymous donor had graced the parish community with a remarkable \$50,000 challenge gift to the school's endowment.

This act of generosity is a bold commitment to the future of Catholic education, inviting the wider community to participate in the sustainability and excellence of the school into the future.

Each year, the school uses the endowment distribution to provide tuition assistance and fund innovative projects in support of its mission.

"Strengthening the St. Mary's School endowment allows us to continue to be inspired, rooted, and excellent in all we do, ensuring a lasting impact on the lives of students receiving a Catholic education."

- Rev. William R. Vander Werff, pastor

About

- St. Mary's School endowment was started in 1992 by Rev. Anthony Vainavicz (Father Tony) to ensure Catholic education would be financially sustainable and affordable into the future.
- The endowment is managed by the Catholic Foundation in a fiscally responsible manner consistent with our Catholic faith, serving as a dependable force for good regardless of market fluctuations.
- The matching campaign will conclude on June 1, 2024.



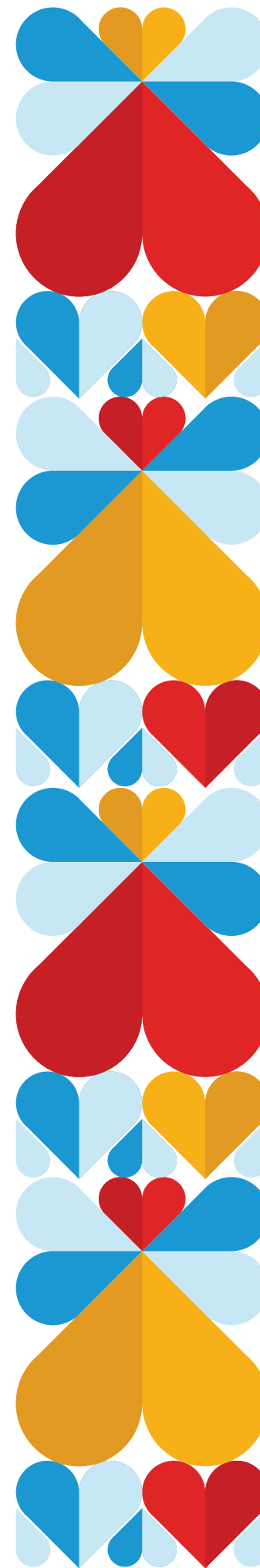
From Left: Greg Deja with Father Tony Vainavicz and Father Bill Vander Werff

St. Mary's School Endowment

Fund surpasses \$1 million!



Granting more than \$471,000 to the school since its inception.

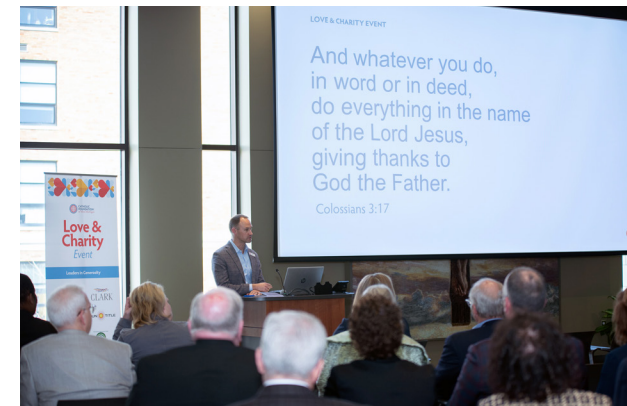


Love & Charity Event

A Celebration of Giving, Impact, and Community

At the second annual Love & Charity Event, leaders in business, nonprofit work, and philanthropy joined the Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak in a celebration of grantmaking.

The reception showcased the power of our Catholic community coming together by presenting grants to eight nonprofits aligned with the Foundation's mission. These organizations, as seen on pages 7 and 8,



have allowed us to directly impact the lives of many throughout West Michigan – developing the next generation of leaders at schools and parishes, elevating evangelization efforts, providing healthy meals to those in need, and supporting new families.

A special thank you to the Bishop's Angels and our sponsors and attendees of the Catholic Business Leaders Forums, whose generosity make these grants possible. From donors to community leaders to recipients — we're all partners in building God's Kingdom.



♥ Celebrating our Grantmaking



The Leadership Formation Institute for Hispanic Ministry

Catholic Information Center | \$8,000

The Leadership Formation Institute for Hispanic Ministry is a three-year leadership development program for lay leaders in Catholic parishes serving the Hispanic community in West Michigan. The program is in its second year with 65 individuals currently enrolled. The goal of the program is to affirm God-given gifts and equip individuals with the skills necessary to create ministries within their parishes, serving Hispanic families that live within every ZIP code of the Diocese of Grand Rapids.



Establishing Catholic Education in Newaygo County

Bishop Baraga Academy | \$15,640

Bishop Baraga Academy is a forthcoming daycare and school that will be the only Catholic school in Newaygo County. Set to open soon, the facility will house two multi-age classrooms for kindergarten through fifth graders, and childcare rooms for newborns through age 6. The micro-school will utilize curriculum from the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, nurturing the spiritual life of children through hands-on, experiential learning in a prepared environment.



Blaze — Helping Girls Hear Who God is Calling Them to Be

Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic School | \$1,000

Project Blaze is an extracurricular lunchtime program for middle school girls at Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic School. Currently in its pilot year, the program guides students through tough topics like friendship, body image, conflict resolution, bullying, and modesty — all through the lens of the Catholic faith. The guided curriculum teaches girls how to walk with purpose and discern God's truth among common lies in today's culture.



Return to Mass Campaign

Diocese of Grand Rapids | \$20,000

The Mass is a communal celebration where Catholics come together as the Body of Christ to receive the Real Presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The Diocese of Grand Rapids knows the power of community unifying to offer praise, thanksgiving, and adoration to God. As a means of evangelization, the diocese launched an advertising campaign to invite and encourage the faithful to return to Mass. The diocese hopes continuing the campaign will increase Mass attendance between 2 and 4% year over year.



Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Prince of Peace Parish | \$9,870

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a religious education program for children aged 3 to 12. It focuses on nurturing the spiritual life of children through hands-on, experiential learning in a prepared environment where they engage with materials and activities based on Scripture and liturgy. This non-traditional, parables-based method helps form a deeply-rooted relationship with Christ at a young age. Prince of Peace Parish offers Adult Formation Certification to train parishioners in the guidance of children through the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program.



Revive & Thrive Project

Nourishing the community, one meal at a time.

Nourishing Meals Program

Revive & Thrive Project | \$3,000

The Revive & Thrive Project cooks and delivers healthy meals to individuals in a health crisis and their families throughout greater Grand Rapids. The staff adheres to the belief that food is medicine, and served almost 18,000 meals to 271 clients last year. The nonprofit employs only five paid staff members, and relies on 40-45 volunteers — including teens who benefit from the mentorship opportunity — and 15 delivery drivers each week.



St. Gianna's No Cost Baby Boutique — Child Safety Classes

Catholic Charities West Michigan | \$20,000

St. Gianna's No Cost Baby Boutique opened in October 2023 in the Creston neighborhood of Grand Rapids. The pantry expanded from its original location in Muskegon, offering clothing and supplies free of charge. Additionally, the boutique also hosts free "Safe Sleep" and "Car Seat Safety" classes twice monthly. A major incentive for parents to participate in these safety programs has been the provision of a complementary child safety item — such as a car seat or portable playard — upon completing the course.



Arrowsmith Program

Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School | \$15,000

For school-aged children with learning challenges, the traditional classroom can be a difficult setting to succeed in academically. The Arrowsmith Program harnesses the principles of neuroplasticity through the application of targeted cognitive exercises to overcome specific learning difficulties. Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic School adopted the program in the 2023-24 academic year, which helps serve students justly and inclusively in a Catholic school setting.





Leaving a LEGACY of FAITH

Wine and Wills Seminar

As Catholics, we recognize everything we have is a gift from God. Throughout our lifetime, the blessings we receive are a result of God's love, and He entrusts us to be good stewards of His manifold gifts.

You have spent decades building your life and living your faith, and yet, arranging for your final intentions can be a daunting task. That's why the Catholic Foundation partners with local parishes, cemeteries, funeral homes, and estate attorneys to offer seminars on the circle of life.

In February, Foundation staff collaborated with St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Grand Rapids to host "Wine and Wills," an important seminar for parishioners to enjoy an evening of fellowship and learning together.

Conversation topics included living well, planning well, and preparing to meet the Lord. The seminar was presented by Father Peter Damian, Zaagman's Memorial Chapel, Barnes & Thornburg attorney David Malson, and the Catholic Foundation.

Talking about end-of-life planning is never easy, but being prepared ensures your final wishes are honored and your family is protected from making difficult decisions. Knowing the Church's teachings on these matters allows you to approach these decisions with wisdom and courage. By planning in advance, you can embrace the fourth quarter of your earthly life with peace and confidence.

Interested in hosting a session at your parish?
Contact us to start a conversation.



Light of Christ Legacy Society

Throughout West Michigan, the Light of Christ Legacy Society honors those who (publicly or anonymously) have made a planned gift in their will or estate plan to any Catholic ministry in the diocese: a parish, a Catholic school, a Catholic organization, the Catholic Foundation or any of its funds, or the Diocese of Grand Rapids.

The Society provides a platform to pray and celebrate together, honor those who came before us, acknowledge these special benefactors before they enter God's eternal Kingdom, and encourage others to join.

As your philanthropic partners, the Catholic Foundation is here to support your charitable giving and create your greatest desired impact.

If you are interested in learning more about establishing a legacy through a gift in your will, please let us know. We would love to help you discover an option that works for you.

"I invite you to consider a special role that you can play by making a planned gift and becoming part of the Light of Christ Legacy Society. Your gift, offered as a sign of gratitude for the blessings you received in this life, will make you present and remembered, long after we have gone home to God."

- Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak, Bishop of Grand Rapids

The Catholic Foundation is
welcoming founding members throughout 2024.

Learn More: cfwmlegacy.org



Are you giving with purpose and intention?

This exercise guides you through a prayerful process to help identify your values, recognize issues that are meaningful to you, and create focus statements that are uniquely yours.

Get started by scanning the QR code for this 30-minute exercise to create your greatest desired impact.



**Allow us to support your
intent and impact.**

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