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After bankruptcy, Iowa diocese raises $22 million

Barb Arland-Fye Catholic News Service | Aug. 30, 2010

DAVENPORT, Iowa (CNS) -- Boosting morale in a diocese deeply wounded because of the abuse of children by some clergy in past decades, Catholics in the Davenport Diocese pledged $22 million in a capital campaign that succeeded despite the worst economic conditions in decades.

The campaign was the first in more than 20 years for the diocese and came at a time of rebuilding following bankruptcy.

All 80 parishes and the Newman Catholic Student Center in Iowa City participated in the fundraising effort that will cover the purchase and renovation of diocesan headquarters in Davenport as well as support clergy, seminarians, schools, parishes and diocesan ministries. More than 9,700 donors contributed, with an average gift of $2,265.

"I am absolutely overwhelmed at the response of people for their church," Davenport Bishop Martin J. Amos said. "The initial need was prompted by the bankruptcy, but the success of the campaign has truly moved us forward in faith and hope."

Bishop Amos said campaign volunteers "were absolutely super in listening to fellow parishioners. I think that was a real benefit to the campaign. For me, personally, I met some absolutely wonderful people in the diocese that I wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity to sit down with and have a conversation.

"People were able to vent about things within the church that troubled them, but at the same time were able to talk about the deep faith that they have and what the church has meant to them in a very positive way," the bishop added.

Capital campaign chairman Mike Bauer was impressed by the generous response of people throughout the diocese in the midst of a difficult economy. He also said he was "humbled by the response of the diocese's priests in making such a substantial commitment of both their personal financial contributions ($1 million in pledges) and their commitment of time and energy to make sure we were successful."

"The diocese will always have as part of its history the clergy sexual abuse crisis. The capital campaign is also part of the diocese's history," said Dominican Sister Laura Goedken, the diocese's development director. "Its success, because of the generosity of the people of the diocese, gives us the confidence to move forward in faith and hope. We can be much more mission focused and mission directed and concentrate on being a eucharistic community."

The size of the goal relative to the Davenport Diocese's combined annual offertory was higher than the typical diocesan campaign, which had to do with the diocese's efforts to recover from bankruptcy. "We were talking about getting the diocese healthy so it could support itself going forward," said Paul Miles, a vice president of Community Counseling Services, which managed the campaign.

"From our firm's perspective, it's one of the truly remarkable and rewarding campaigns that we've been a part of," Miles added. "We've been impressed by the people of the diocese who took it upon themselves to lift their church out of the financial problems they were in."

The 20 percent rebate to parishes also proved to be an attractive incentive. "We were particularly influenced by the rebate program because we have all kinds of needs here at St. Paul the Apostle," said Father Mike Spiekermeier, pastor of the Davenport parish. His was one of five parishes that piloted the campaign.

The first rebate check, for $65,648.15, helped with payments toward purchase of property and construction of a parking lot for the growing parish. Future payments will go toward other improvement projects.

St. Mary Parish in Grinnell, another pilot parish, received its first payment -- $23,877 -- and used it toward purchase of a new air conditioner in the church, said the pastor, Father Nick Adam. Future checks will go toward other physical needs at the church, such as repair of the front steps.

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