



Building our Future

Holy Rosary Capital Campaign plans for campus improvements to educate future generations

BY BETH SIMKANIN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NORA BOSWELL

LOCATED IN THE HEART OF EAST MEMPHIS IN THE CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF MEMPHIS, HOLY ROSARY CATHOLIC SCHOOL HAS PROVIDED STUDENTS WITH A FAITH-BASED EDUCATION THAT FOSTERS EXCELLENCE IN SPIRITUAL, ACADEMIC, PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL FORMATION FOR ALMOST 72 YEARS. WITH A CURRENT ENROLLMENT OF 445 STUDENTS, THE SCHOOL OFFERS A STRONG ACADEMIC CURRICULUM FOR ALL STUDENTS, INCLUDING UNIQUE LEARNING PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM, STUDENTS WITH LANGUAGE-BASED LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND ACADEMICALLY GIFTED STUDENTS. THE SCHOOL, WHICH OFFERS EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL THROUGH EIGHTH GRADE, IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE PARISH MINISTRY OF HOLY ROSARY CATHOLIC CHURCH.

This year marks the third and final year in fundraising efforts for its \$7.5 million “Building Our Future” capital campaign to upgrade the school’s original facilities from the 1950s by constructing a new, two-story, 12,000-square-foot education building. The current capital campaign is the second part of a four-phased approach to update and upgrade the school’s campus to secure Catholic education for future generations in the Diocese.

To date, approximately \$4.1 million has been raised for the capital campaign, and this year, a generous anonymous donor is matching dollar-for-dollar donations up to \$500,000 to assist in fundraising efforts for the school to reach its targeted construction date in June of next year.

“Holy Rosary has played an integral part to the growth in East Memphis,” said Tom Sullivan, Chairman of the Building Our Future Capital Campaign Committee at Holy Rosary. “It’s now the closest Catholic school to the Mississippi River in our Diocese. It’s important to all Catholics in our Diocese that Holy Rosary continues to serve all Memphians. It’s an evangelization tool for our families, children and community.”

SCHOOL HISTORY

Even though Holy Rosary Catholic Church and School were constructed at the same time in the 1950s, the school, which at the time contained four classrooms, two bathrooms and a school office, opened first in 1954. Construction of the church was completed the following year.

The church and school were centers of education, fellowship and worship for the newly developed Colonial Acres neighborhood in East Memphis. Enrollment substantially grew and additional classrooms were added to the original school building in the late 1950s, and in 1960, an additional wing and building were constructed. A separate gymnasium was built in 1968 to serve both the parish and school.

Decades later in 1989, an additional two-story building, which still houses kindergarten and junior high classrooms, a small reception room and kitchen, was constructed.

Ricky Bursi attended Holy Rosary in the ‘60s and remembers walking to and from school every day with his classmates.



“There is nothing more important than Catholic education. It’s imperative that children know about the Catholic faith and the role they have for the future.”

– Darren Mullis, Principal of Holy Rosary Catholic School

“Holy Rosary was ground zero for me growing up,” Bursi said. “It had a neighborhood feel at the time. My whole life since childhood has revolved around both the school and parish. I received such a strong education and faith foundation experience there that my wife and I sent our three children to the school in the ‘90s and 2000s.”

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

In the ‘90s and early ‘00s, members of the Holy Rosary Parish Council began planning for capital improvements for both the church and school. The inside of the parish was renovated in the mid ‘90s and upon completion, the parish council began to plan a long-term, four-phased approach to make capital improvements to both the church and school facilities, which at the time were a half-century old.

In 2010, phase one was completed with the construction of a new, 16,000 square-foot Parish Life Center with a new gymnasium and parish office. The multifunctional facility is used for parish office space, church and school events, wedding receptions, school aftercare, meetings, and a parish food pantry.

In 2015, the Building Our Future Capital Campaign Committee was formed and began working with Hord Architects in Memphis to design a two-story education building that would replace the school’s original wing from the 1950s and create a more prominent, secure entrance into the school.

“The purpose of this new building is to create larger classrooms, modernize the facilities which are over 70 years old and create a safe space that has more technology upgrades,” said Darren Mullis, Principal of Holy Rosary Catholic School. “We want to ensure the improvements serve families for generations to come. This existing wing of the school is beyond its lifespan.”



Our Vision



Fundraising efforts were stalled because of the COVID pandemic in 2020. Finally in January 2024, the church and school officially launched the \$7.5 million “Building Our Future” Capital Campaign to meet the modern needs of the faculty and students at the school.

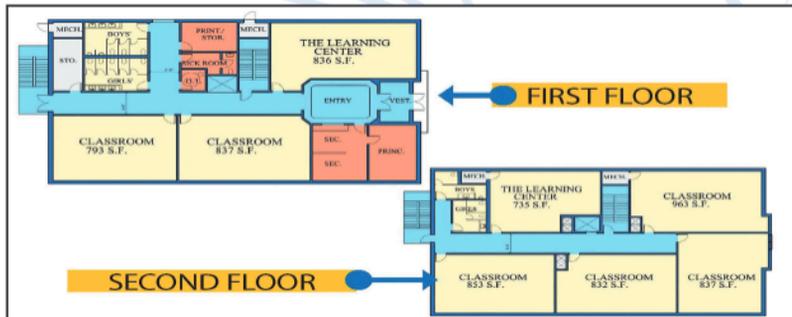
The two-story building will consist of new school offices, eight classrooms, an infirmary, bathrooms, a printing/storage area, mechanical rooms and an elevator. The ergonomic design will allow for more green space for children to play.

The purpose of the building is not to increase capacity, but to maintain enrollment by providing a more modern learning environment for students in third through fifth grades, as well as students in The Learning Center (TLC), the school’s specialized learning program for children with language-based learning difficulties like dyslexia. Currently, 32 children are in the TLC at Holy Rosary, which offers a 4:1 student to teacher ratio.

According to Mullis, the goal is for the construction project to be completed in August 2028 – just in time for the beginning of the 2028-29 school year. The “Building Our Future” Capital Campaign will continue its efforts to complete phase three and four of capital improvements in later years, next replacing the elementary school wing built in 1960, and finally, the original gymnasium on the south side of the school’s campus.

LEGACY OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

According to Nick Roberts, who attended Holy Rosary in the ‘80s and ‘90s, the parish



and school environment is unique because of the rich legacy of alumni who either coach, teach or send their own children to the school. He’s seen first-hand alumni give back to the school.

Fourteen adults on the school’s staff all attended Holy Rosary as children, including Mullis and the school’s Vice Principal, Anne Gardino. Bursi serves on the Executive Board for the Memphis Italian Festival, a three-day cultural and fundraising event for Holy Rosary Catholic Church. Roberts, whose daughter also attended Holy Rosary, coached junior high football for 15 years and is active in the church’s Brothers in Christ men’s prayer group.

“Holy Rosary is a school that is thriving,” Roberts said. “I’ve seen students grow in their faith and confidence here. Many of the families at the school are involved at the parish. It’s important to the entire Diocese that our Catholic schools continue to thrive. They need upgraded amenities and facilities, so that they can continue to serve families for generations to come. It’s important we all do our part to see it come to fruition.”

Father Jeo Poulose, Pastor of Holy Rosary Catholic Church, agreed.

“The life of the church depends on the life of the school,” Father Poulose said. “Families come strengthened in faith to our church. If there is no school here, there is no more church here in 10 years. Our school families are very devoted to both parish and school life.”

CALL TO ACTION

To date, an additional \$3.4 million needs to be raised by June next year when the school plans to begin demolition of the school’s original facility. From January 1 to December 31 this year only, all completed donations up to \$500,000 will be matched by an anonymous generous foundation. Bursi stresses that a donation for the campaign is not just an investment for Holy Rosary, but for all Catholic education in the Diocese.

“The school and parish underwent a construction project 15 years ago,” Bursi said. “We’ve seen firsthand what a difference upgraded facilities can make. It’s time to make a long-term investment in our Catholic schools and churches in the Diocese. Catholic schools are the foundation of our communities and we want to continue to see successful outcomes for the children and families of the future.” †

BETH SIMKANIN is Managing Editor of *Faith West Tennessee*. She is a parishioner at the Catholic Church of the Holy Spirit in Memphis.

To make a pledge or donate to the “Building Our Future” Holy Rosary Capital Campaign, scan the QR code below.



Checks Payable to:
HRC Building Our Future
Holy Rosary Catholic Church
4851 Park Avenue
Memphis, TN 38117

Donate:
holyroarychurchmphis.org/donate/

Questions:
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HOLY ROSARY CATHOLIC SCHOOL



Holy Rosary Catholic School is a co-educational experience for students in preschool through eighth grade. The school provides a solid foundation in academics and faith-based studies with a robust athletics program and extracurricular activities for all grade levels.

Additionally, Holy Rosary recognizes that each student is unique and learns differently. It offers many programs to ensure that each student has an opportunity to excel:

The Angel Program

This program is specifically designed for children living with autism. It offers year-round intensive instruction for children in grades 3K through fifth grade within a traditional classroom setting. The school now has 11 children in the program with a 2:1 student to teacher ratio. The school accepts children into the program from grades 3K through kindergarten.

The Learning Center (TLC)

The Learning Center is for students in first through eighth grades with language-based learning difficulties, such as dyslexia and dysgraphia. With a current program enrollment of 32 students, they each receive instruction by teachers in the Orton-Gillingham Method, which is a structured multi-sensory approach to teaching reading, writing, and spelling.

According to Darren Mullis, Principal of Holy Rosary Catholic School, "It's a school within a school. Students in The Learning Center receive their own instruction in a four to one, student to teacher ratio environment, while also getting the benefits of the whole school by taking PE class and specials, such as religion and foreign language, within the larger school."

The Quest Program

This program provides additional learning opportunities for academically gifted students. These opportunities promote the development of a student's critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

For additional information on Holy Rosary Catholic School call 901.685.1231 or go to holyrosarymemphis.org.

