

Fuller than it had likely ever been when it was a one-room schoolhouse, the St. Rose School officially entered its new life on Sunday as Our Fathers House.

Folks from the St. Rose and Maria Stein, Ohio, community, along with family members of Fr. Ken Schroeder, C.P.P.S., and Fr. Gene Schnipke, C.P.P.S., for whom the building is now named, crowded into Our Fathers House for its dedication and blessing after the 11 a.m. Mass in the St. Rose Church next door.

Fr. Ken Schroeder was presented with a commemorative basketball and given the chance to take the first free throw in Our Fathers House, now a gym that committee members pledged will be open 24/7 for young people in the community.

The building served as a school from 1892 to 1957. After that, it was converted into an ad hoc gym, with backboards and rims on either end. Many kids from the area grew up honing their hoop skills in that old building, which in recent years had reached a tipping point where it was in danger of being tipped over by a bulldozer.

Local resident Nick Schulze formed a committee: Treva Fortkamp, Brett Hartings, Sue Fortkamp and Dan Moeller, and with the permission of their new pastor, Fr. Ken Schnipke, C.P.P.S., launched a fundraising campaign.

“They put me in an awkward position—I was just becoming the pastor (of what is now the Christ Our Light Family of Parishes), and one of the first projects was a building to honor my brother,” he told the crowd with a smile. “But clearly, the community was in support of it.”

The fundraising effort, launched in December, was an immediate success. Schulze announced at the dedication that it raised \$181,000, far beyond its initial goal of \$100,000. Many local businesses, construction firms and craftsmen donated funds, labor and/or materials for the project.

Schulze said the building was renamed after Fr. Ken Schroeder and Fr. Gene Schnipke because of their commitment to the youth of the area during their time as pastors (Fr. Ken from 2002–08 and Fr. Gene from 2008–20) and beyond. Fr. Gene died unexpectedly in 2022, while serving as pastor of the Northwest Dayton Parishes. Fr. Ken Schroeder, 87, is in retirement at St. Charles Center, Carthagena, Ohio, but still attends Marion Local sporting events and is following the current Flyer football team on its tourney trail.

“These two great men invested so much of their time in our youth—we wanted to pay them back,” by honoring them with a building that gives today’s youth a place to gather, said committee member Brett Hartings. “No one will forget them or what they gave to our community.”

The additional funds raised enabled the committee to expand the project, which will include outdoor basketball courts and courts for pickleball and shuffleboard, said committee member Treva Fortkamp. “They say shuffleboard is a hot thing in Florida, and we want it to be a hot thing here,” she said.

Treva presented a commemorative basketball to Dolores Schnipke, mother of Fr. Gene and Fr. Ken Schnipke. “This will be the first ball played with in this building,” Treva said. “We hope it gets worn out. Then we’ll get another one, then another one.”

Security cameras plus the community's regard for Fr. Ken Schroeder and Fr. Gene Schnipke will protect the building, she said.

Fr. Ken Schnipke offered the dedication prayer, based on a prayer his brother often shared with Marion Local sports teams. Then Fr. Ken Schroeder sprinkled holy water on the building's new floor.

"I want to thank you all," Fr. Ken Schroeder said, looking around the full house. "This is the life of the Church, right here in this room. It's wonderful, isn't it?"