



# Sisters in Ministry: "M" is for Miracle

*"Education is the only way out of poverty and the only way to make your life better." ~ Sister Barbara Bir*

In early 2004, Sister Jamesetta DeFelice was facing a dilemma. Enrollment at St. Anthony Catholic School in Clarksville, Indiana, where she was serving as principal, was down and it looked like she may have to combine classes and increase the student to teacher ratio. Sister Jamesetta was worried. She knew that kind of change would mean less individual instruction and the students and teachers may suffer because of it. She wrestled with the decision and asked God for guidance. Little did she know help would come from a program that would later be headed by another Ursuline Sister.



**Sister Barbara Bir talks with parents and staff at CCC**

Just across the river, in Louisville, the Community Catholic Center was struggling. The Center helps families in the West End and Portland neighborhoods send their children to Catholic schools by supplementing tuition for those in need. But there was a serious problem: Catholic schools in the area had all closed and it was proving difficult to find a Louisville school ready to partner with the program.

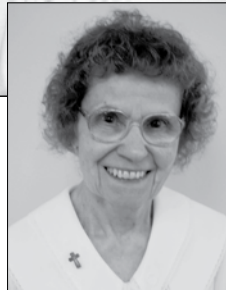
So, Catholic Community Center's members set their sights on Southern Indiana and approached Sister Jamesetta and the pastor, Father Dismas Veeneman. The pair was ecstatic. More students enrolling meant class sizes could remain as they were, the students would continue to receive the quality instruction found in most Catholic schools, and St. Anthony's would be

reaching out and providing a Catholic education to those in need. For the families at CCC, it meant help was finally on the way.

"I just wanted the best for our kids," Brenda Edds, a mother of one girl in the program, told us.

"Community Catholic Center makes it possible for us to give our kids a better chance of succeeding."

"I wish people were aware of this place," Mike Edds, Brenda's husband said. "I wish they just knew what their contributions will do. We need to help our own because charity begins at home."



**Sister Jamesetta DeFelice**

"I remember one student from CCC asked me if we were going to close," said Denise Lewis, an 8th grade teacher at St. Anthony. "He was so very worried about it. It brought tears to my eyes. I tried to reassure him that we'd be here as long as he needed us."

A short time later, in August of 2004, another Ursuline Sister would find herself working with Sister Jamesetta through the Community Catholic Center. Sister Barbara Bir was hired as the Executive Director of the organization because of her passion for education, as well as her skills and background.

"It was such a comfort and joy to know Sister Jamesetta and be able to work with her in her role at St. Anthony," Sister Barbara said.

## The History of CCC

Community Catholic School closed in 2003. It was the last Catholic school in West Louisville. The pastor promised Catholic education for any at CCS who wanted it. Thirty student were transported to St. Rose School (at St. Elizabeth Parish). However, that school closed at the end of the school year, and the pastor retired. The CCS Board became the CCC Board who then decided to "be church" for the people of Portland and continue the hope for a Catholic education.

Her primary role with the center continues to evolve, but she works as an advocate and resource for the parents, an advocate for the students and a liason to the schools, including St. Anthony.

"Ours is a holistic approach. We build community because there is a lack of coming together, of being a community in all our neighborhoods," said Sister Barbara. "It just melts my heart. We accept what they can pay and sometimes that's not much, but education is the only way out of poverty and the only way to make your life better."

Sister Jamesetta knows the significance of what the Community Catholic Center and Sister Barbara are

doing. When she first made arrangements to enroll students from the Center at St. Anthony, she opened a file for all the paperwork choosing to put it under "M" for "miracle."

"I just knew that's where it belonged," Sister Jamesetta said. "Something amazing was happening and it was God's hand that was making it possible. This program, this partnership was and continues to be a miracle."

Sister Jamesetta is currently in ministry serving other Ursuline Sisters and lay residents at Marian Home on the Ursuline Campus; Sister Barbara continues to serve and help grow the Community Catholic Center in Louisville.