

Corpus Christi earns grants

Principal sought help from unlikely source

By Teresa A. Parsons

A small, Methodist-oriented foundation was the last place Sister Eileen Daly, SSJ, expected to find help for a small, Catholic elementary school with lots of needs.

But when you are principal of an independent, urban Catholic school — namely Corpus Christi — you can't afford to stick to obvious funding sources. So Sister Eileen applied last spring to the Fred and Floy Willmott Foundation anyway. Because she took that unconventional route, students at the school have a lot to look forward to in 1987.

Thanks to four grants totaling \$13,500, Sister Eileen can purchase new computers for a math lab, hire a part-time music teacher, repair part of the 100-year-old school building's foundation and arrange for students in grades five through eight to spend their gym periods at the YMCA.

"It's one of our most successful applications ever," she said. "There's very little foundation money available for elementary schools, much less for Catholic elementary schools. And nobody gives you money for building repairs."

Building repairs for a Catholic school are a little out of the ordinary for the Willmott Foundation as well. With assets of more than \$4 million, the foundation generally distributes nearly \$250,000 a year in grants averaging \$5,000 each, according to Kathleen L. Piper, grants coordinator.

"We don't support that kind of thing as a rule," Piper said of the unusual grant. "This was kind of a one-time thing. They're doing such a wonderful job (at the school), and the percentage of students going on to secondary education is quite high. There was a real flavor, a spirit there. It was just a very organized, happy environment."

In 1977, Corpus Christi School responded to a threatened closing by incorporating separately from the parish. Since then, it has remained independent and is operated by parents of students.

One reason it has survived one financial crisis after another is that Sister Eileen,

principal for the past decade, has constantly sought new funding sources.

She first learned about the Willmott Foundation through a newspaper article published last December. The article explained that Floy Willmott, a former Rochester city schoolteacher and the daughter of a Methodist minister, had established the foundation in her will, stipulating that it should support urban education, Methodist Church ministries and programs for senior citizens.

The foundation has, however, given grants to several Catholic Church-sponsored programs, including Corpus Christi Parish's Rogers House, a restaurant that provides employment and housing for ex-offenders.

With a lengthy wish list and not much hope, Sister Eileen finally applied to the foundation last April. "I was originally going to ask for just one grant, but then I wound up writing for five," she recalled. "In the back of my mind, I kept thinking 'You're not going to get it; you're not going to get it.'"

When a foundation representative called with questions the following June, she became a bit more optimistic. By September, when several other representatives called and asked to visit the school, she was genuinely excited.

"I assumed that they couldn't be taking this much trouble unless they were really interested," she said.

On December 18, she received the long-awaited letter along with four checks. The foundation gave \$4,000 to purchase computers for a math lab that will offer remedial help as well as computer literacy training for all 200 students, who currently share two computers.

Another \$4,000 grant will finance an expanded music program. By hiring a part-time teacher, Sister Eileen hopes to offer each student the chance to listen to and learn to read music, and to participate in an after-school chorus.

Most of a \$3,000 grant for repairs will be used to stop leaks in the school basement by

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Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Bobby Haines (left) and Nicole Bibb, along with fellow students in fifth through eighth grades at Corpus Christi School, will soon be enjoying an expanded physical education program, thanks to one of four grants the school has received from the Fred and Floy Willmott Foundation. Above, the eighth-graders are shown playing volleyball.

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