

Mission for the Millennium

Frequently Asked Questions

IHM Motherhouse and Monroe Campus Renovation

What is Sustainability?



The World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

Acknowledging that Earth is a living organism, sustainability embraces the idea that all of creation has the right to thrive and flourish. It is lived out through choices that commit to wise, appropriate and efficient use of resources, so that population and demand do not outrun or damage Earth’s long-term ability to support the entire community of life on our planet. For the IHM community, sustainability is a spiritual and moral mandate in this 21st century.

The 117-acre campus is home to the IHM Motherhouse. The space includes managed lawns, open meadows and prairies, an organic garden, a constructed wetland, a five-acre cemetery a three-acre pond and a 518 Kw solar array. The four-acre Sisters Island and River House - IHM Spirituality Center are located across West Elm Avenue, on the banks of the River Raisin.

What is the IHM vision for the Monroe Campus?

The mission of the IHM community is to continue the transforming mission of Jesus Christ through education, advocacy for people and eco-justice. Our vision for the Monroe Campus is that it will continue as a place of transformation through education, serving as a 21st century center of sustainable living and learning.



Why did the IHM community choose to renovate rather than build a new Motherhouse?

Built in 1932 during the Great Depression, the 376,000-square-foot structure with 18-inch concrete and brick walls was deemed by architects and engineers to be built solidly enough to last into the 23rd century. The building’s historical and spiritual significance and beauty, as well as the environmental impact of demolition and rebuilding, were all important considerations in discerning the future of the building as a home, headquarters and health care center for IHM Sisters and future residents. The IHM community thus chose an “environmentally responsive sustainable design,” renovating the indoors and restoring the campus as one sustainable and cohesive system.

How were the design consultants, architects, construction company and tradespeople chosen to accomplish the vision?

The IHM community issued its requirements, with detailed specifications, to those who wished to submit qualifications to the selection committee. The Request for Qualifications asked companies to demonstrate clearly, through their own vision and experience, their understanding of sustainable values and their ability and willingness to practice the three “Rs” – reduce, reuse, recycle – on the project.



Geothermal energy uses Earth’s temperature for heating and cooling. The 240-hole, closed-loop system provides efficient, renewable, and lower cost heating and cooling to the Motherhouse. The system takes advantage of Earth’s steady 55-degree underground temperature. Water that is constantly circulated through the 54 miles of pipe will be warmed or cooled by Earth. In essence, Earth is being utilized as a large radiator.

How else has environmentally responsive sustainable design been utilized in the building renovation?

Each product and building system was selected based on the least negative impact on the environment during the manufacturing process and use of renewable sources of materials and energy. Sustainable elements chosen include cork flooring, low-VOC paint, mineral wool insulation, managed forest wood products, retrofitted light fixtures and gypsum wallboard, which utilizes recycled materials. Additionally, every effort was made to salvage, reuse and/or recycle materials. More than 800 existing wood windows were restored and hundreds of solid cherry wood existing doors were reused.



Water is a non-renewable resource that is becoming scarcer in our world. The installed graywater system reduces water consumption by 6,200 gallons per day. The system retrieves used water from sinks and showers, referred to as graywater, in the Motherhouse via a separate graywater piping system routed to a constructed wetland. The wetland filters the water in a way similar to Earth's natural cleansing process, and the water is then returned to the building for flushing toilets.



Deep Faith. Courageous Spirit. Action for Justice.

How has the landscape been altered?

Diverse elements in the site design look to our geographical area, the Maumee Lake Plain Bioregion, for cues. The Monroe Campus lies within the River Raisin watershed, a regional water system that extends westward to Jackson and eastward to Lake Erie. The bioregion, in its natural state, was a deciduous swamp rich with northern hardwoods, prairie, savanna, red maple, emergent marshes and wet meadows. Nature itself provided a sustainable balance. The site restoration returned areas to meadow savanna planted with seasonal grasses and wildflowers. As non-native trees die, they will be replaced with young, regionally appropriate species. An endangered oak savanna ecosystem, formerly part of the IHM campus, will be preserved through a conservation easement. Swales in parking lots capture storm-water runoff and relieve the city drainage system. Motorized traffic has been diverted to the property's perimeter to allow for contemplative pathways and spaces, easily accessed by wheelchairs.

What has the IHM community learned through the renovation and restoration process?

The IHM community has learned that transformation requires a change of heart. A commitment to the Gospel's transforming mission has called the IHM community to recognize that Earth has suffered abandonment in many ways. Through this process, the IHM community has become aware that the poor suffer disproportionately from natural disasters due to environmental devastation. The IHM community, the architects, the construction company and its subcontractors have learned together much more about how sustainable renovation and restoration



can have a beneficial environmental impact. This has led to a transformation of professional construction and renovation approaches and practices. In turn, the contractors and subcontractors who worked on this project are now implementing Earth-friendly practices on other projects, thus changing the marketplace of the future.

Restoring and transforming this bit of Earth and developing it into a center for sustainable living and learning will impact systems and the lives of all people touched by the IHM community and its colleagues. In this 21st century, as it has since 1845, the IHM community will "risk deeds our own hearts could never dream."