

© The Catholic News & Herald, Feb. 25, 2009

Welcome ministry says goodbye
Leaves behind legacy of hospitality

by KATIE MOORE
staff writer

CHARLOTTE — After many years of saying hello to new parishioners, one of the oldest ministries at St. Gabriel Church in Charlotte is saying goodbye.

The Handmaids of Mary has served as a welcome committee for new parishioners since shortly after the church was established in 1957.

The group, which began as a chapter of the worldwide organization, the Legion of Mary became a parish ministry under its new name in 1989.

Their purpose was to welcome new parishioners to the parish, originally by home visits and eventually by telephone calls.

“We met weekly and said the rosary in the chapel,” said Nell Farley, who has overseen the ministry for the past 26 years.

Each week the group acquired the names of new parish registrants.

“We would all take some of them and give them a call,” Farley said.

“The blessing to the parishioners of St. Gabriel from the Handmaids of Mary has been the many rosaries prayed for them,” said Deacon Ben Wenning, permanent deacon at St. Gabriel Church.

“And that each and every one of them was made to feel welcome by a visit or a phone call after they registered,” he added.

In recent years, the group’s numbers have dwindled, which is the primary reason they are ending the ministry.

“We’re getting up in years,” said Farley, who added that the need for their service isn’t as necessary as it once was.

When Farley joined the group back in 1982, there weren’t as many ways for parishioners to get involved at the church.

“At that time there weren’t the ministries that we now have,” she said. “Our church does a lot of other things to welcome new members.”