



VISIONARY

# Father Michael Gemignani

By JEAN CIAMPI

in Freeport, saw his vision become a reality.

"There's a bottomless pit of need here for medical services. There are so few who will take Medicaid," Father Mike said of the medical community. "And those who will, their rolls are filled. This medical center was very needed."

The center, which started

**BRAZOSPORT  
MEDICAL CENTER**

QUALITY EYE CARE • W.D.  
MEDICAL CLINIC • YOUNG  
PENICILLIN • HERBERT



IMAGE PHOTOS BY JESSE MILLER

## A man of vision

In 1997 Freeport was not the place to be if you needed medical attention.

At that time the more than 18,000 people living there had no practicing physicians to turn to with their health issues. What they did have, though, was Father Mike. And Father Mike had a vision.

When the Brazosport Medical Center opened its doors more than four years ago, Father Michael Gemignani, the rector at St. Paul's Episcopal Church

with one primary care physician, a dentist, an ophthalmologist and a single pharmacist, had more than 13,000 patient contacts last year alone. Ninety-five percent of which were Medicaid patients. More are expected this year.

Since its inception, primary care and dental services have been expanded. Father Mike and the Center's Board of Directors are working to bring more specialists, chiropractic care and

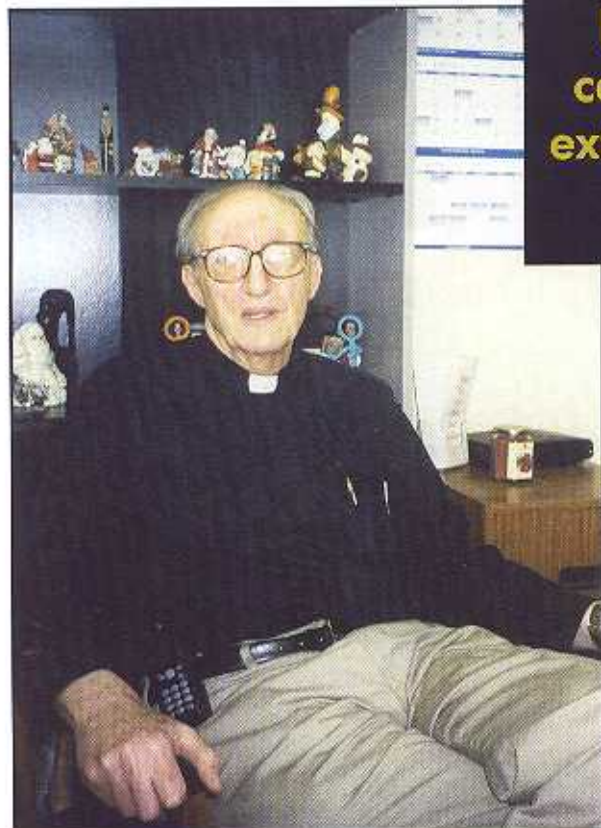
Is there a drug problem? Are they laid-off? If it's a drug problem, for example, they get them into treatment. Joshua Tree is a comprehensive program that follows them through to be sure they get the help they need."

Father Mike's unfaltering dedication to the Medical Center's success has been infinite. "I wrote grants and proposals and handled most of the planning. Six months before and then one to two years after it opened, it was a full time job for me," he said.

"It took a lot of emotional energy. There was one crisis after another. A couple of times I was really worried that this was the end, and then God opened another door."

These days the outlook for the clinic is very bright. An executive director has been hired. The board is cohesive, productive and looking towards expansion. Father Mike can now turn some of his attention to other things.

His interests are as diverse and limitless as his capabilities. A licensed attorney in three states, including Texas; a former professor of mathematics, computer science, and telecommunications; past Senior Vice President for Academic



### Father Mike's care for others extends beyond the church

mental health services. The facility is now the newest United Way agency in Brazoria County, and the Jesse Tree program is also in residence.

"The Jesse Tree started in Galveston to pair people with needs to agencies that can help," explains Father Mike. "It prevents duplication of services. They try and get underneath the presenting problem to get help for the real issue. If a person needs rent, why do they need rent?"

Affairs and Provost at the University of Houston, Clear Lake; author of 14 published books and over 100 articles spanning topics from law to religion to computer science and math; a husband and father of three.

"And he has a church, which by itself is no easy feat," his wife Nilda points out brightly. "He can do six things at once and all of them brilliantly. He sits on lots of boards like Hospice and the Cancer Clinic. He's an extraordinary academician and a lovely priest. He likes people and listens. He's as bright as all get out."

Is there much he can't do? What about plumbing? "He can do that, too!" Nilda laughs. "I didn't think he could do all the things I could, but he can. He has a wonderful sense of humor, and we laugh every day."

A tireless servant in his work with the Episcopal Diocese of Texas, he has become the spiritual advisor and Chaplain for the Diocese's Daughters of the King, a group of 2600 Episcopal



*Father Mike and Executive Director Nola Copus discuss Brazosport Medical Center business, above. In top photo, Father Mike shows a visitor planned new office space.*

women. His active and growing church has a congregation of approximately 125. And his wife reveals that he composes and plays beautiful hymns as a form of prayer.

"I have abilities. I'm highly educated," Father Mike admits. "I need to use it. It's a responsibility to use it, as a Christian.

"Some say I'm a sick, workaholic, that I should have been a committee. I have a very unusual background, but I've used all of it. I've lived several different lives that have all fit together and fed each other."

He's now taking some time to see what new opportunities present themselves.

"I do not intend to leave Freeport. I have no ambitions for a larger church or to be elected Bishop," he said. "With this congregation, we've done a lot, and, God willing, it will continue. I'm sure there are more surprises in the future."▲