

New, Hispanic Knights of Columbus council making history

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



ROGERS — St. Vincent de Paul Church in Rogers became the first Catholic church in Arkansas to have a Spanish-speaking charter for the Knights of Columbus.

On Oct. 12 State Deputy Jim Neff presented a charter to the Hispanic Knights of Columbus Council #14609 Mexican Martyrs.

The new council is named for six priests who were murdered by authorities in Mexico during the early 20th century and were canonized by Pope John Paul II in 2000. On display at the charter ceremony was a silver reliquary containing the relics of the six Knights of Columbus Priests Martyrs of Mexico.

Ed Viera has been named charter grand knight for the council. Early in 2008, he had the opportunity to hear Father Bill Elser, the state chaplain, speak at the state convention for the Knights of Columbus. “After Mass we were talking about how it would be a good idea if the Knights would open up to Hispanic councils in Arkansas,” Viera said. “Fifty percent of Catholics in Arkansas are Hispanic now.”

It was the inspiration of Father Elser that led Viera to begin the process of forming the council in Rogers.

According to Viera, Father Elser had taken the time to memorize the Mass in Spanish for them. “If this man can take the time and effort to memorize the Mass in a language he doesn’t speak, how could I not take the time and effort to create a Spanish-speaking council. I was the grand knight at the St. Stephen’s council in Bentonville and since Rogers has a huge Spanish-speaking population, this seemed like the perfect place to start,” Viera said.

Although the council was officially created Oct. 12 with the chartering ceremony, the council

was meeting before that.

Viera said, "On May 22, 2008, I presented the idea to the parish of establishing the council. Then June 22, 2008, was the first day we actually recruited members. And on Sept. 2, 2008, I was made grand knight of this new council. Everyone who has been involved with the Knights of Columbus have been surprised at how fast this has happened."

Currently, there are 41 members with seven others waiting to go through the induction ceremony in December. Viera believes that the membership will grow to 100 within a year. These plans include praying the rosary before the 1 p.m. Mass on the first Sunday of each month. With the celebration of the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on Dec. 12, the Hispanic Knights of Columbus will lead a procession to commemorate this event in Rogers near the church.

A long-term goal for the council would be to raise money for the church and community.

"It would also provide an opportunity for Hispanic men to show that they too are an asset to the community. I don't think there is an organization that gives them that avenue right now," Viera said.

In raising money, Viera hopes that funds could be provided for scholarships for high school students and seminarians.

He said, "Hopefully, we can raise enough to participate in the RSVP program in the Knights of Columbus. This is a program where a council sponsors a seminarian. It is a state program by the diocese. And a lot of seminarians are Hispanic now."

According to Adrian Dominguez, financial secretary of the council, there are many benefits to having two councils in one parish.

"There are huge benefits in that it unites more men in these two councils to do different things for the church," he said. "The Hispanic men can work as spiritual leaders within the Hispanic community to unite with the Anglo community to improve relations. This is what we need to work for."

One thing Dominguez pointed out was that "unfortunately not all Hispanics speak English, and they are uncomfortable in participating in those English-speaking meetings or activities that the Anglo Knights of Columbus have."