

After 10 years, St. Juan Diego Chapel in Wickes gains church status

written by Special to Arkansas Catholic |



Three days before the feast of St. Juan Diego, Dec. 6, was a memorable day for the community of Catholics in Wickes. On that day, Bishop Anthony B. Taylor elevated St. Juan Diego Chapel to church status. Pastor Father Jose Antonio Galvez-Orellana assisted him. Father Galvez-Orellana also serves St. Barbara Church in De Queen.

The faithful have waited a long time for the consecration. Church secretary Marcela Chavez explained that in August 2000, people gathered in their homes for Bible study each week. When Sisters Joselina Cedeno and Bibiana Valdez, Missionary Carmelites of St. Teresa, heard that the people were holding Bible studies on their own, the sisters visited them and encouraged them in their faith.

Later, former pastor Father John Kerr celebrated Mass for the first time in a private home in Wickes (Polk County). Fifteen people attended. Father Kerr told the people he would continue to celebrate Mass once a month if they kept attending.

Mass attendance now has grown to 40 to 60 worshippers. The number depends on the people's job schedules. The Wickes Catholics needed a name, and Father Kerr and the faithful chose their name, approved by then-Bishop Peter J. Sartain.

The Wickes Catholics collected money to rent a building in Wickes for their chapel. Mass is celebrated there every Saturday at 6 p.m. Before the Mass is celebrated, children attend religious education classes.

The faithful in Wickes have goals to be reached in the future. The first goal has to do with the liturgical and catechetical aspect. Every worshipper needs to be well taught. The second goal is to attain financial independence. The third goal is to have leadership independency.

Father Galvez-Orellana has seen a strong faith manifested by the people of Wickes. He said, "Even though they are in a non-Catholic community, they have worked so hard, with their own resources, in the building of their church."