

Little Rock parish campaign to update school facilities

written by Malea Hargett |



Christ the King Church in Little Rock is seeking to raise \$10.5 million to begin construction in 2014 to renovate its school, family life center and perpetual adoration chapel and add a columbarium.

Its “A Growing Church for a Growing Faith” campaign kicked off Nov. 17 in the school cafeteria, one of the spaces that is inadequate for school and church needs.

“We don’t build it for ourselves, but for them,” Deena Burnett-Bailey, a campaign chairwoman, said of the parish children. “We have to have a vision of what comes after us.”

“I think we are all going to feel great when it is all done,” Dr. Brad Baltz, another campaign chairman, said.

The largest Catholic church in Little Rock was established in 1967. In 1986 the school opened with 200 students and has more than tripled enrollment.

If \$6.5 million is pledged, the church will begin renovation to extend the school cafeteria into the current undersized Family Life Center. School lunches are staggered over many hours, making some children eat at 10:50 a.m. and some as late as 12:40 p.m. With a larger cafeteria, the serving time can be reduced.

One unique project the parish is tackling is building a storm shelter that could be used by parishioners and students in case of tornadoes. Two safe rooms will be built near the gymnasium and will hold up to 800 people, which would include the entire school body, teachers and parish staff. Mary Catherine Burney, director of fundraising, said the safe rooms will be used as multipurpose rooms and could be accessed by students when they need to have

recess indoors.

“If a similar storm (to the May 20 tornado in Oklahoma) hit our campus, the resulting damage would be devastating,” according to the church campaign brochure.

The school also will get an entrance that is identifiable with covered drop-off area and walkways leading from the school to the church. Overall the school will add eight classrooms.

Among other school projects:

- A “special needs” classroom will be added because the learning assistance director does not have a dedicated space where children who need tutoring and therapy can be served.
- New areas will be added for a Spanish classroom, conference room, administrative offices and school nurse.

The adoration chapel will get a facelift with a new exterior, bathrooms, additional entrance and insulation on the windows. A columbarium, or burial niches, will be created for families who choose cremation for their loved ones. More than 50 percent of deceased parishioners are cremated currently, the parish reported. At least 423 niches will be available initially with a possible expansion up to 797 niches. The columbarium will be built near the adoration chapel by Mary’s Garden and will be accented by a reflecting pond and fountain.

Once the \$6.5 million mark is met, in the second phase, the parish will address the lack of space in the Family Life Center, with its small kitchen and limited meeting space. The church currently does not have enough space for large events and has to open moveable partitions and use the school cafeteria.

The new space would include a larger kitchen and bookstore, welcome center, gathering space and social hall that could seat up to 494 people.

Msgr. Francis I. Malone, pastor, is asking parishioners to pledge money over three years to accomplish the project. In the initial phase before the kickoff, the church was able to secure \$823,225 in pledges from volunteers.

The committee chairmen are Dr. Brad and Amy Baltz, Deena Burnett-Bailey and Joe and Dana Kleine.

The parish is making prayer the center of the campaign and asked parishioners Dr. Paul and Kathy Wendel to write a special prayer to be used during Mass. A prayer vigil will be held at 3:30 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 18 on Commitment Weekend. Celebration Weekend will be held Feb. 15-16 where the campaign total will be announced. After Feb. 16, the parish will be able to announce what projects it can address first and when construction could begin, Burney said.