

# Off-duty officers patrol Christ the King in Fort Smith

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FORT SMITH — Christ the King School became the first Catholic school in the River Valley to offer uniformed security to its students.

Through a partnership with the Fort Smith Police Department, the school is allowed to use off-duty officers who have been trained by the department.

Four officers share the responsibility for coverage from the school's opening until the last child has been discharged from afterschool care at 5:30 p.m., patrolling the halls and accompanying the children to recess, activities and weekly Mass.

"This is something we have wanted to do for several years, and we finally worked out a way to make it happen," principal Myndi Keyton said. "The administration, School Board and the faculty all were in favor of having police officers on campus."

The school has an active fundraising year, beginning with Raise Craze, a program in which students do a series of good deeds and sign-up sponsors to make donations for their efforts. It

has regular Spirit Nights at local restaurants and is the principal beneficiary of the parish carnival in May. The school is currently sending out its annual appeal letters to parishioners. An electronic sign featuring the names of the school's business sponsors sits at the foot of the parking lot.

The school funds the cost of the four off-duty officers and makes school safety a top priority.

"We work with the FSPD on campus safety and have made many improvements to our campus in the last five years," Keyton said.

These include keycard entries, bullet resistant glass for interior doors and exterior windows, privacy netting for the fence on the playground and security cameras.

Assistant principal Katie Kratzberg, who has three children attending Christ the King, said the response to the police presence has been very positive.

"Having these amazing police officers on our campus each day gives invaluable peace of mind to me as both a parent and administrator. It is one of the many ways we ensure that we are keeping the students as safe as possible while under our care," she said. "They have added so much to our school culture, and I love seeing the relationships they have already formed with our students."

Parents and visitors continue to have access during the school day. Each visitor checks in and out of the school office and is issued a photo ID to be worn during the visit.

"Our parental access to the school has been the same for the last five years," Keyton said.

Parent Allison Cross said she had an emotional response to the police presence.

"At the first glimpse of a squad car and uniformed officer I had tears of relief from the weight of worry. The visible officer presence on campus has given us peace and gratitude," she said.

Both Immaculate Conception School and Trinity Catholic School in Fort Smith are also making efforts to improve school safety. Deacon Brad Brown, Trinity's administrator, said the Catholic schools met last spring to discuss safety and share information after the Uvalde, Texas, school shooting.

Trinity has done walk-throughs with a school security expert and estimates the cost of safety renovations to be almost half a million dollars, Brown said.

"Our building was built in the 1950s and is very large," he said.

Part of the building is used as the Trinity Center, a retreat and events center.

"We looked at replacing our windows with safety glass, putting new locks on all classrooms, putting one-way windows in the doors of the classrooms," Brown added.

Immaculate Conception School has a separate pre-school building. In addition, the school gymnasium is located adjacent to Galvin Hall, across Rogers Avenue from the two school buildings. Pastor Father John Antony said each of the three schools has unique challenges, but all are doing their best to make their facilities more secure.

“Our consultant also told us that it would be good if the Catholic schools could share the cost of an off-duty police officer,” Brown said.