

New diocesan development director followed God's call

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



Kelly Wewers has excelled in her career by following two things — the numbers and God's will.

The daughter of a banker, Wewers knew since she was a teenager that she was destined for a career in finance.

"From the time I was 16 years old, I worked in a bank," Wewers said. "I would go in after school and on weekends and during the summer in college."

After receiving a degree in financial management from the University of Arkansas, she worked for Guaranty Bank in Dallas from 1990 to 1998, where she reached the position of North Texas Region Manager.

In 1996, she converted to Catholicism and moved from Texas to Little Rock — where she was born and raised — in 2002. Wewers and her husband, Eric, became parishioners at Christ the King Church in Little Rock. She began helping with fundraisers and events for the parish as she stayed at home to look after her three children, Logan, Claire and Luke.

In 2008, she saw an ad in Arkansas Catholic announcing an opening for an administrative assistant in the Diocese of Little Rock's finance office.

"I just kept feeling this tug," Wewers said. "My story's all about discernment. I would pray, and I would look at the Arkansas Catholic the next week and I would say, 'OK, if I'm supposed to do

this, the ad will be in there. And it wasn't there. But I just kept feeling like something was up, and I would keep praying about it. Then a couple months later, I opened up the Arkansas Catholic, and there was the ad again."

Wewers was hired in 2008 as the administrative assistant for finance director Greg Wolfe. After helping with a string of successful fundraisers, Wewers' efforts were noticed in the Catholic community.

Just two years later, after organizing an auction and dinner at Catholic High School, where her oldest son was a student, Wewers began working for Mount St. Mary Academy in Little Rock as the director of special events and database manager. She then transitioned to being the financial administrator and financial and human resources manager. In all, she served at MSM for 14 years.

Then, earlier this year, Wewers felt that familiar tug once again.

"I felt that tug, that maybe I was supposed to be doing something else," Wewers said. "I prayed about it a lot."

God called Wewers back to the diocese to use her new experiences and skills to assist with fundraising campaigns, including the diocese's annual appeal, Catholic Arkansas Sharing Appeal. Wewers began working as the director of stewardship and development April 29.

She succeeds Dianne Brady, who retired in March.

"The most important thing to me about being here is, I want to not only raise money, but I want to support the parishes and support the priests so that I can take things off their plate and help them reach the goals they want to reach," Wewers said.

She hopes to bring dreams to life for Catholics across the state by helping them navigate the financial side of their goals.

"I want people to be plugged into their parish ... have people ask themselves, 'How can I help build God's kingdom?'" Wewers said.

As Wewers has followed God's plans for her, she realized that each career step prepared her for the next thing God had planned for her.

"Everything you've done in your life leading up to what you're doing now was to prepare you," she said. "I really feel like we all have a path. And if you stick to your prayers and really listen to the Holy Spirit, you'll find your path and where you're supposed to be. That's all we can really ask for."

Fort Smith church raising \$2.5 million for

security

written by Maryanne Meyerriecks |



FORT SMITH — During the Church’s Eucharistic Revival, Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith is raising funds to relocate its Blessed Sacrament to the back altar.

The parish is launching its \$2.5 million campaign on the feast of Corpus Christi June 1-2. It also will mark the church’s 125th anniversary. The campaign will also fund improvements in the church, elementary school, preschool and rectory.

Pastor Father John Antony previewed the capital campaign in his Easter homily.

“Every detail in this church is designed to evoke faith, even the direction you are all seated, facing the east, which is where the word ‘Easter’ comes from,” he said. “We are an Easter people because every time we come to church we face east, to behold the rising Son, the resurrected Christ. The east, the sun, everything is designed to help us believe without seeing and pass the test of faith.”

A new, larger back altar will be built to accommodate the tabernacle and candles, with an additional step added to make the Blessed Sacrament visible to the congregation. The statue of the Sacred Heart will be moved and a new statue of St. Patrick, representing Immaculate Conception’s Irish heritage, will be purchased.

A reception will be held in Galvin Hall after all weekend Masses on the launch date, featuring historic exhibits. Later in the afternoon, Immaculate Conception will join St. Boniface and Christ the King churches in their annual Corpus Christi procession.

Renovations will begin this summer, starting with the two schools.

“We will be adding a classroom to our preschool building so that we can accommodate an additional 18-month-old class,” Father Antony said. “We will be replacing the roof and cooling tower on the elementary school building and adding a secure vestibule. The security camera at the door only shows faces, but by adding an enclosed vestibule — think of it like an airlock — we will be able to see what the visitor is wearing and what (s)he may be carrying. The covered walkway will keep children sheltered while waiting for afternoon pickups.”

The preschool classroom will be ready by the first day of school, and Immaculate Conception is taking registrations for a second 18-month-old class.

The rectory has crumbling mortar around the chimney and in the basement, and Apolo, Father Antony’s dog, needs some room to run. The campaign will fund the repairs, new landscaping, expanding the yard, fencing and two covered parking spaces.

The amount to be raised has been reduced from \$3 million to \$2.5 million because the church was unable to complete the proposed solar energy project.

“We initially thought we could put solar panels on the roofs of Galvin Hall and the gymnasium but providing enough energy for our entire campus would require leasing a four-acre field. The rebate program, which would allow us to sell unused energy to OGE (Oklahoma Gas and Electric), is undergoing major changes in September, which would result in a fluctuating rebate rather than the existing almost 1 to 1 ratio,” Father Antony said. “In order to be grandfathered in at the present rate, we need signed contracts, and OGE is not interested in speeding up the process. It almost makes it not worth it because we would be selling our energy to OGE for nowhere near a 1 to 1 ratio.”

Immaculate Conception is committed to reducing energy use in other ways, replacing school toilets with low flow, self-flushing units and replacing appliances and windows with energy-efficient models when needed. Father Antony said he hopes the projects will come in under budget but is conscious of inflation.

The parish has about 2,000 families, and an average pledge of \$1,250 per family, payable over three years, would finance all the needed improvements.