

# **Knight of the Year always ready to help Northwest Arkansas parish**

written by Katie Zakrzewski |



For 38 years, John Kittelson has said yes when the Knights of Columbus need help.

Every year, one distinguished knight in Arkansas is recognized as the state’s Knight of the Year, with an opportunity to be recognized in an international Knights of Columbus ceremony. This year Kittelson, a parishioner at St. Bernard Church in Bella Vista, was chosen for the honor.

He was recently elected deputy grand knight for the coming fraternal year and hopes to take on the grand knight role in the future. Kittelson served as the chancellor and member of the finance council for Council 9514, as well as faithful navigator for Assembly 1783.

Grand Knight Don Ammons nominated Kittelson for the honor.

Kittelson co-led two faith programs at St. Bernard in the last year as a faith director called “Consoling the Heart of Jesus” and “33 Days to Morning Glory.” Kittelson also led the St. Joseph’s Altar display in the parish hall to collect food for those in need.

“When Father Barnabas (Maria Susai, IMS, pastor) needed transportation support, John has driven him to the monastery so Father can give Mass,” Ammons wrote in his nomination form. “John leads the buildings and grounds project team, taking on campus projects. Faith is (the) cornerstone of John’s life and this is proven by his sharing that early in life, he was in the

seminary. Faith is woven into the fabric of John's existence."

You can find Kittelson volunteering for parish pancake breakfasts and helping widows in his parish with lawn work. Kittelson leads the planning for major parish events at St. Bernard, including Oktoberfest, the chili supper and St. Patrick's Day and Cinco de Mayo celebrations. Kittelson is also involved in the Men's Club, where he served as president last year, and on the parish finance council.

Kittelson is in charge of determining beneficiaries and donations from funds earned through parish bingo and calling bingo each month.

Kittelson, 76, a retired firefighter, also works with the Bella Vista Fire Department to organize a disaster preparedness program each year. He is also active in the Bella Vista Rotary Club and the Winterfest children's community celebrations.

Kittelson is also very involved in pro-life programs. St. Bernard's Council 9514 is in charge of landscaping the area around the Statute to the Unborn. Kittelson, a hobbyist landscaper, helped lead the way for clean up and re-beautification efforts.

"John is just one of those individuals whose service is just part of his name — it's part of his being," Ammons told *Arkansas Catholic*. "He's always there, ready to serve no matter what it is. ... He has the energy of someone 30 years his junior."

He said Kittelson's landscaping hobby, yard work and maintenance has proved invaluable at the parish. Kittelson joined the building and grounds committee and began working on maintenance and repairs. One such project Kittelson is currently working hard on is creating a rosary garden and creating a family pavilion.

"The average age of our parish is probably mid to late 70s, and so we're doing some things to try to encourage young families to join the parish," Ammons said. "It's really the future of our parish ... So that's another project that's coming, and John has already dug into that project and working to get that pavilion project moving as soon as possible so that we can guarantee the future of our parish."

This year's Supreme Convention, which will be attended by delegates from states, countries and territories around the world, will be held in Quebec, Canada, Aug. 4-8. Kittelson will be recognized for his efforts and will represent Arkansas' Knights of Columbus.

Kittelson told *Arkansas Catholic* he was surprised to learn he was nominated because the Bella Vista Knights of Columbus council members are all very active.

"Our council in Bella Vista ... has had great leadership over the last seven years, and they give you the inspiration you need to work hard," Kittelson said. "I do a lot of stuff around church, and I never really think about it. I just do it because I think that's what God is telling me to do. I'm retired, and I devote my time to my church and what it needs, what needs to get done, without even thinking about it."

Kittelson was told to make plans to attend the state convention, as he was one of nine nominations.

"So I wasn't expecting anything. And when the final announcement came at the banquet, I was

shocked,” Kittelson said with a laugh. “I was speechless ... I was lost for words. It’s an honor. I don’t expect that recognition. That’s all I could say about whatever I do. I do it for the glory of God.”