

Campaign reaps spiritual, financial rewards

Faith In Our Future reaches \$87.5 million

In the midst of the third and final wave of the Faith In Our Future campaign, campaign leaders are hoping for what marathoners seek as they near the end of their 26.2 mile race.

“We’re looking for momentum and a strong finish, said Debra Lethlean, campaign director.

The \$87.5 million pledged to the Faith In Our Future Trust by more than 41,000 people represents 83 percent of the campaign’s \$105 million goal – a goal that Bishop William P. Callahan, chair of the board of trustees for the trust, believes is attainable.

“We have \$20 million to go. Twenty million is still doable, even in this economy. The situation with Faith In Our Future, given the sense of generosity of the people of God, will continue to manifest itself,” he said. “I’m not saying we’re going to do it tomorrow. This is going to take some time, but I believe that the strong sense of stewardship that we have developed within the church of southeastern Wisconsin will help us be successful.”

Lethlean noted that the transition from Archbishop Timothy Dolan as the most visible and vocal leader of the campaign to Bishop Callahan has gone smoothly due to the latter’s enthusiasm for and knowledge of what was needed to make the campaign successful.

“Bishop Callahan assumed leadership of the campaign without a moment’s hesitation. He’s been conducting top prospect visits, helping our parishes with their solicitations and donor gatherings, and speaking in our parishes during weekend liturgies. We haven’t missed a beat,” she said.

Lethlean added that Bishop Richard Sklba’s articles on the principles of biblical stewardship inspired Catholics and helped them understand what it means to embrace stewardship in their lives.

“It’s been an all-out effort and an awesome experience working with the bishops and a strong Faith In Our Future campaign steering committee chaired by Ed and Diane Zore, and with our pastors and thousands of parish volunteers who embraced the campaign’s goals,” said Lethlean, noting that O’Meara Ferguson’s lead campaign



An integral part of the Faith In Our Future campaign, according to Debra Lethlean, the campaign’s director, was the emphasis placed on prayer as Catholics considered what they would contribute to their parishes and to the broader church. (Photo courtesy of the Faith In Our Future campaign)

consultants provided sound counsel that ensured the campaign launched strongly in 2007.

The biggest challenge has been the sustained economic downturn, but that has not dampened the enthusiasm of Lethlean or the volunteers who have been part of the campaign.

“The economic downturn has impacted size of major gifts in our parishes, but Catholics have been enthusiastic about the campaign. A number of parishioners commented, ‘Father, talk to me a year from now because I may be able to increase my pledge at that time,’” Lethlean said.

The 460 major gifts given to the campaign have accounted for \$29,221,153 or 28 percent of the goal.

Response to real need

Steve Graff, a member of St. Mary Visitation Parish, Elm Grove, said that he and the 22-member major gifts committee he chaired sensed the importance of passing Catholic values along to future generations among the nearly 100 people they contacted.

“I think that the success among larger donors is due to the case statement of supporting Catholic education,” he said. “It really resonates with major donors. It struck home as a real need.”

Graff noted that the potential gives the committee contacted “liked the niches in Catholic education,” e.g., campus ministry, the seminary, Catholic schools and faith formation, and that they liked the concept that shared resources between parishes and the archbishop’s initiatives.

He credited Archbishop Dolan and Bishop Callahan for their leadership in the campaign.

“Their practicality resonated with people,” he said.

Volunteers critical to campaign’s success

Volunteers played a critical role in parishes with successful campaigns.

“We had a good group of volunteers to fill needs,” said Fr. Kevin Kowalske, pastor of Holy Trinity Parish, Newburg, whose parish exceeded its \$161,525 benchmark by more than 35 percent. “We had a broad base of support.”

At St. John the Evangelist Parish, Kohler, Jack Egan, who co-chaired the campaign with his wife, Carol, and Mel and Lorrie Free, emphasized the importance of parishioners’ involvement.

“We had more than 100 people involved in committee work,” he said about the parish in which there are approximately 370 units. “It was very gratifying.”

Egan noted that young parents with families were among those to help.

“We are laying the foundation for future generations,” he said.

Lethlean said, “Pastors and parish campaign chairs worked hard to recruit Faith In Our Future volunteers, and many recruits were newly identified leaders. Pastors are seeing the benefit as these new volunteers assume other leadership roles within their parishes. St. Alphonsus Parish in Greendale is launching its campaign in November and this parish has recruited over 100 volunteers.”

Capuchin Fr. Michael Bertram, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi, Milwaukee,

worked with the parish campaign consultant to tailor the campaign to fit the parish's unique personality. One key group of six members led the parish campaign.

He stressed that the parish portion of the campaign funds would be used for faith formation programs and for repairing and maintaining buildings on the parish grounds, including paying off in three years the cost incurred for re-roofing the church. Fr. Bertram saw more than 51 percent of the 300-400 households in his parish respond.

Pastoral priorities being achieved

The financial achievements of Faith In Our Future are quantifiable and invested in the Faith In Our Future Trust to benefit Catholic education and faith formation initiatives in parishes and broader initiatives that benefit all Catholics. The \$87.5 million in pledges already achieved will have a positive impact on the faith lives of Catholics for years to come, according to Lethlean.

"But, this campaign is about more than money," she said, noting that Archbishop Dolan's pastoral priorities of strengthening Catholic unity and deepening Catholics' understanding of stewardship were also being achieved. The six weeks leading up to the launch of each parish campaign emphasize prayer, reflection and stewardship education.

"Parishioners are asked to give prayerful consideration to what God is calling them to do for their parish and

for the broader church. This leads to a 'faith response' and a deepened awareness of the needs of the church that draws people closer to their parish communities," Lethlean said.

Fr. Kowalske noted that at Masses celebrated during the campaign, campaign-specific prayers were said. But it didn't end there.

"Our parish started a new prayer network that continues today," he said.

Fr. Bertram noted that his parish's case statement emphasized faith formation.

"We talked about Mass being the font of all faith formation," he said. "Everything starts there."

Bishop Callahan said that, to Archbishop Dolan's credit, faith was integral to the vision he had for the campaign.

"This is what Archbishop Dolan saw at the beginning of the campaign. He was advised by some not to proceed with launching a capital campaign, yet he recognized the critical need and forged ahead. His basis was not 'I'm a strong prelate, I'm going to do this,' but rather he followed Jesus' words (Lk 5:4): 'Go out and cast your net into the deep,'" the bishop said.

According to Bishop Callahan, that faith and vision have had a positive impact upon the Catholic community.

"That struck a chord in so many new people — people who hadn't made contributions to the church, who hadn't been involved in the church, ordinary folks in the pew; all of sudden they feel a sense of ownership, a sense of participation," he said.

The bishop said he has heard "incredible spiritual stories" as a result of the campaign.

"Parishioners have given financially to the campaign, but in the process, they have brought their stories and reconnected with the church, reconnected with priests, reconnected with Jesus Christ," he said. "They have a real sense of what faith can do."

Home stretch

To date, 205 parishes have launched campaigns and many are continuing follow-up efforts to maximize their success. The remaining five parishes will launch the public phases of their campaigns in the coming weeks. The final faith community to participate, Holy Family Parish in Fond du Lac, will hold its commitment weekend in mid-December.

Final campaign results will be announced in spring of 2010. Reflecting on the impact of this historic effort, Lethlean reiterated the campaign's ability to enhance the faith lives of parishioners.

"Our goal going into the campaign was not just to raise a significant amount of money, but that post-campaign our parishes would be strengthened for the future. We are truly gratified when we hear pastors tell us that Faith In Our Future has been a good experience on multiple levels for their parishes," she said.

Editor's Note: This article was submitted by the Faith In Our Future Trust.

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