

New chancellor humbled by Archbishop's trust

Josée Marr says that when Archbishop Richard Smith appointed her as the new Archdiocesan chancellor, she immediately saw the decision as a sign of trust – one that she plans to take very seriously.

“The Archbishop trusts the person, the chancellor, the priests, when he grants them those faculties. So, it’s a gift and I want to honour that with the utmost integrity,” said Marr, who was appointed as the first female chancellor for the Archdiocese February 14.

Marr’s appointment closely follows the appointment and installation of Bishop Gregory Bittman as the new bishop of Nelson, B.C., which opened several positions in the Archdiocese.

Marr replaces the previous chancellor, Father Adam Lech, who has been appointed as Moderator of the Curia.

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“You see Pope Francis more and more mentioning having (a) woman’s voice in the Church, so Archbishop Smith is showing his openness to following that direction with Pope Francis,” said Marr.

For more than 28 years, Marr has served in several important roles for the Archdiocese, starting as an administrative assistant for Archbishop Joseph MacNeil, and ending in her becoming the vice-chancellor in 2012.

An avid runner, a former fly-fisher and an active member of her parish community, Marr says that most of her interests outside of work are both faith-related and also athletic in nature.

“I did a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, a pilgrimage to Assisi (Italy) in the footsteps of St. Francis, so this is a combination of being physically active and integrating a faith component to these activities,” she said.

Marr, originally from Victoriaville, Quebec, says her time in the Archdiocese has been a unique blessing in her life, allowing her to blend her personal life of faith with her professional life of service.

“In the component of service, you have a sense of contribution, a sense of participation, and for me, my faith is integral to everything. It’s a seamless way of living and being,” says Marr.

As chancellor, Marr’s responsibilities – including everything from developing and reviewing policies, to maintaining the Archdiocese’s extensive system of church records, such as baptismal certificates – play an indispensable role in keeping the Archdiocese running smoothly.

When it comes to current projects, Marr says she’s working on further updating the efficiency of the record-keeping system within the Archdiocese, which has been the model for other similar systems across Canada.

Marr also explains that while her responsibilities haven’t dramatically changed since she moved from her position as vice-chancellor to chancellor, she’s now directly responsible for the chancery office.

Explaining the value in rules and policies to laypeople – such as with marriage or baptism – is often a challenge, says Marr, especially since some people don’t see the spiritual value in ‘church rules’.

“People look at the church as (only) a set of rules,” said Marr, and adds that people should instead see the rules as guideposts, which she says point toward what is good for them.

“There’s always a reason, that often pertains to the belonging of the faith community or that brings people to have a greater intent and integrity in the faith that they live,” she said.

She adds that while explaining Archdiocesan rules and policies can be a challenge, she has found success over her nearly three decades of experience in helping people see the value of church policies.

“The most satisfying – and I have lots of (these moments) in my 28 years here that have borne fruit – is (when) people say ‘Oh, now I understand!’ or ‘Oh, this is really clear for me, thank you!’”

“When you get those kinds of responses, then you know that you’ve met the challenge, so that’s very gratifying,” said Marr.

For Marr, having the opportunity to work with Catholic leaders like Archbishop Joseph MacNeil, Archbishop Thomas Cardinal Collins, Archbishop Smith and Bishop Bittman was a profound learning experience.

“I’ve been really blessed to work with outstanding leaders, and I say that my school was a school of discipleship with these kinds of leaders,” she says. “Peter and John could say that they were at the school of the discipleship of

Jesus, and we're all at some point are disciples of someone."

This article was updated on May 10, 2018, to correct date of appointment.