

St. Mary Catholic Church Celebrates Century of Faith



By Kimberly Jacobson

What started as a small group of Catholics meeting at a parishioner's home has grown to a congregation 470 families strong at St. Mary Catholic Church.

The Rev. Vu Tran, who joined the parish in mid-2006 as its pastor, says the church's beautiful building as well as its wonderful parishioners draw people to the church and keep them coming back to share their faith.

“Although we are a small parish, the parishioners are quite generous with their time, talent and treasures in helping the parish to grow,” Tran said. “Parishioners express a great love for God in the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist and perpetual adoration.”

The church marks its 100th anniversary this year.

It will host three weekends of religious events as part of its centennial celebration — “The Vatican International Photographic

Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles of the World” is open for public viewing 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Friday in the Father Auer Center, 4001 St. Mary’s Drive; a Mass with Archbishop Alexander Brunett presiding is 10:30 a.m. Sunday, Aug. 15 followed by a reception banquet in the Father Auer Center; and the “Faith on Fire Catholic Youth/Family Conference” is Friday to Sunday, Aug. 20-22. The archbishop is retiring this year, Tran said, and parishioners are planning to give him some mementos from the parish such as an icon of Our Lady of Anacortes.

A few parishioners are putting together historical artifacts and information to help the parish remember its history.

“We are planning a memorial wall to honor deceased priests that have served St. Mary parish, and certain key families that played a vital role in forming the parish,” Tran said. “Also, a grotto in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes is being put together by the Knights of Columbus.”

In addition to the church’s services and faith formation offerings, it connects to the community through its St. Vincent de Paul Society (which helps the needy in the community), food bank, annual St. Merryfest festival and rummage sales.

The first Mass in Anacortes was held in 1890 at the home of Mrs. Adelaide Davis Kasch by the Rev. W.J. Metz, who came from Sacred Heart Church in La Conner, according to a church history. Mrs. Kasch had the children meet at her home for catechism. When the La Conner church was dedicated, she had a class of eight or 10 prepared for their first communion. She took the children to La Conner in a hay wagon. They left Anacortes at 5 a.m. and it took two and a half hours to make the trip.

“She took the children to a hotel where they put on their white dresses and veils, and then to the church for 8 o’clock Mass and holy communion,” according to a history by the Rev. Gustav Treunet.

Beginning in about 1895, Mrs. Kasch spearhead a drive for a church building. There were about 30 families in the mission parish then. The women sponsored parties, fairs and dinners to help raise funds. Plans for the church were drawn up by Mrs. Kasch's father, Mr. Davis, who also did most of the construction. The church was built at the corner of Seventh Street and N Avenue. It was dedicated in 1904 by Bishop Edward J. O'Dea.

In late 1909, the little wooden structure was moved to 1208 Seventh St. St. Mary officially became a parish in February 1910 and the French-born Treunet was appointed its first pastor. He stayed 38 years until his death in 1948.

In 1916, a grotto to Our Lady of Lourdes was built at St. Mary. Flowers and shrubs were planted and a rustic archway was built leading to an outdoor chapel ideal for quiet prayer and meditation.

A hall, which was to serve as the basement for the parish's projected new church, was completed in 1920.

In January 1924, a fire burned out the church sacristy and destroyed all vestments, robes, statues and furnishings in January 1924, causing an estimated loss of \$3,500.

Treunet suspected the fire was a result of a "fanatic's attempt to destroy the church."

"We have lost a great deal. My sacristy and all its contents are gone and the body of the church is in a lamentable condition," he said. Anacortes Catholics attended Mass in the parish hall the Sunday after the fire. Treunet spoke about the indestructibility of the church.

"Do not worry," he said, "our church building may be burned, but the church cannot be destroyed. Though the church was burned, we have

our hall; if the hall is burned, I shall say Mass in my house; if the house is burned, we shall have Mass outdoors.”

Church records say whoever set the fire was not found but the charred mechanism of a fire-bomb the suspect supposedly used was uncovered. The church was not reconstructed. Mass was offered in the parish’s basement for five years until, in 1929, a \$40,000 church was completed.

The church’s Father Auer Center was completed in 1969 and the current church in 1978, moving Mass from the parish’s former church in downtown Anacortes. The old building is now home to the Croatian Club.

More recently, the church embarked on a \$1 million renovation beginning in 2003 under parish pastor the Rev. W. R. Harris. The project expanded the front of the church out about 24 feet to provide for an enclosed gathering area, add space around the baptismal font, make interior improvements and add separate men’s and women’s restrooms to replace the single restroom, according to an Anacortes American story. Plans also included expansion of the vestibule and main entry to the church. About 40 percent of the project involved upgrading the building.

Tran said in the future, the church is looking at renovating the Father Auer Center so it can use the building to help with faith formation and other activities.

Visit <http://www.stmaryanacortes.com>.

Centennial celebration events

- Get a rare chance to view “The Vatican International Photographic Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles of the World” open for public viewing 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. through Friday in the Father Auer Center, 4001 St. Mary’s Drive.

The descriptive 140-panel photographic exhibition features more than 100 fascinating church-approved Eucharistic miracles from around the world and across the ages.

Exhibit admission is free, but donations will be accepted to benefit The Real Presence Association. Visit <http://www.therealpresence.org>.

- St. Mary Catholic Church invites you to get fired up with dynamic Catholic speakers, Mass, music, new friends, food, camping and more at the “Faith on Fire Catholic Youth/Family Conference” Friday to Sunday, Aug. 20-22. The photo exhibit will also be on display those days for attendees.

Featured guests include:

- Tim Staples — “Catholic Answers Live!” radio personality/apologist, former Marine and Protestant minister, author and inspirational Catholic speaker.
 - Steve Ray — Popular Catholic holy land guide (nicknamed “Jerusalem Jones”), author, speaker, father, convert and creator of “Footprints of God” video series.
 - Sister Miriam James Heidland — Lively young Catholic revert and former Archbishop Murphy High School volleyball coach. Once a party girl she found peace in God.
 - Angus McDonell — Youth minister, composer and famed World Youth Day performer will serve as weekend emcee and concert bandleader.
 - Auxiliary Bishop Joseph Tyson — Con-celebrating Sunday’s closing Mass. The conference will be held outdoors with Mass, adoration and the photo exhibit indoors. Free parking. Free tent spaces for singles and families, plus limited RV parking available on a first come, first served basis.
- For information call 293-2101 or visit <http://www.faithonfire-nwusa.org>