

Statue of Mary symbolizes hope for peace

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By Doreen A Simon, American staff writer

Members of St. Mary's Catholic Church are hopeful that peace has a place in the world – even as war threatens to erupt in the Persian Gulf.

They commissioned a marble shrine of Mary, "the Mother of God" to remind all who seek the stark white figure that peace is a goal.

"Queen of Peace" has been used by the Catholic Church for centuries," said the Revered Gerry Clenaghan of St. Mary's. "I believe, and we believe, that in total peace there is justice first and then peace becomes a reality."

Clenaghan said justice, as defined by Christians, is the Ten Commandments. The commandments speak of a person's relationship with God and neighbors, Clenaghan said.

"If there is a balance between reality and justice, then there is peace," he said.

The "Queen of Peace" statue is more than a symbol of peace for the congregation. Clenaghan said it also commemorates the parish's 75th anniversary, which was celebrated five years ago.

"We had a very pleasant and happy celebration, but there was nothing permanent to mark the occasion," he said. "We needed something to remind us physically of our past."

"We're overjoyed," said parishioner Barbara Hansen. "As our name is St. Mary's we think it's very appropriate and welcome."

Hansen is a member of the Pastoral Council and president of the Altar Society. She said most of the congregation was just as enthusiastic about the project as was Clenaghan.

The statue helps bring the community together by reminding us to keep a good thought for peace no matter who we pray to, Hansen said.

Clenaghan said he talked to the congregation two years ago about an idea to commission a statue. Last fall, a group from the congregation approached Clenaghan with an offer to finance the project. Ten local people, not all members of St. Mary's, helped fund the project.

Through European connections – East Germany native Joe Richter and his Italian friend Alessio Faville, an Italian sculptor, Sirio de Ranieri, was commissioned to create the “piece of art” for the parish, Clenaghan said.

Two and a half months later, the white Carrara marble statue taken from a quarry in northeast Italy was complete.

Guemes Island resident Peter Andriesen was in charge of architectural design for placement of the statue. Clenaghan said the result is truly on-of-a-kind.

While the finished statue, located between the church and school and facing toward the main part of Anacortes, may be unique, the pose isn’t. The image of Mary with her hands clasped prayer-like under the chin is a traditional one seen in other depictions of her.

“It’s a fairly typical thing,” Clenaghan said. Mary is wearing robes that sculptor Ramieri was able to give life to. She looks as if she just stopped for a moment to rest. The folds of her gown and robes gracefully fall down her back. The stark white of the marble creates light and dark.

Clenaghan is especially pleased with the details of the “Queen of Peace.” There are three different textures – a wool-like finish to the robes, a flesh-like finish on the skin and a scaly surface on the serpent on which she is standing.

In the New Testament, the book of Revelation, chapter 12, verse one, refers to the pose of the parish’s “Queen of Peace,” Clenaghan said.

The book refers to an early church belief that Mary conquers the dragon – serpent of Satan- by becoming the mother of the savior, Clenaghan said. In giving birth to Jesus, she destroyed the rule of Satan.

The Catholic church doesn’t consider Mary an idol or goddess, Clenaghan said. Rather, it pays her respect because she was chosen by God to give birth to the Son of God, he said.

“In the church, she is the second Eve,” Clenaghan said. “Adam and Eve blew it, but Mary and Jesus fixed it.”

The project became a community one that transcended church boundaries. Dave Taggart, a landscape contractor, donated the stone base in memory of Theresa Rodger who died two years ago. Clenaghan said she had played the organ in the church for 60 years. Taggart bought his rock quarry from her father.

The high base atop which Mary stands also has rocks from Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, where there are continuing reports of apparitions of her, and from Fatima, Portugal, where she was seen in the early part of the century, Clenaghan said.

Other community help came in the form of Harold Mousel of M & M Construction, the contractor in charge, from Anacortes. Stone masons were Warren, Homer and Nolson Chambers of Sanwood.

The parish hopes that the "Queen of Peace" will bring the community together by emphasizing what they have in common with others outside the congregation, Clenaghan said.

St. Mary's Catholic Church will dedicate "Mary: Queen of Peace" at a special ceremony at 6 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 22. A mass will start at 5 p.m. at the church. The Rev. Ted Marmo, pastor of St. John Mary Vianney of Bothell, will bless the statue, Clenaghan said.

Marmo was invited to the dedication because he is the only Catholic priest who grew up in Anacortes before attending the seminary and becoming ordained.

This year he is celebrating 25 years in the priesthood, Clenaghan said.

Friends who attend school with Marmo are invited to attend the dedications, as are any Anacortes resident, regardless of membership.