Community steps up when hard times hit

Flood waters and economic struggles haven’t kept St. Joseph parishioners from responding with their time and treasure

CHEHALIS
BY TERRY MCGUIRE

As pastor for just eight months, Father Tim Ilgen is already impressed with the support he sees both financially and in volunteer help at St. Joseph Parish.

Impressed because Lewis County is among the poorest counties in the state, having endured an unemployment rate of 12.1 percent over the past two decades, according to state figures.

“Yet the people still support the parish, and our collections have remained steady,” he said. “And a lot of it, I think, is a reflection on the love that the church community has for St. Joseph’s, and our pastor.

“There’s a great spirit of community here,” Stanton said.

That spirit was evident in December 2007 when waters from a “hundred-year flood” inundated area homes and closed Interstate 5. St. Joseph’s, working with its five partner parishes and missions, and with Catholic Community Services and the St. Vincent de Paul Society, turned its facilities into a command center for supplies.

Over the decades, St. Joseph’s has produced numerous leaders in business, government and other areas, Stanton said. Parishioner Vivian Roewe, for example, was Chehalis’ first woman mayor. The parish has seen several of its daughters become women religious and at least one son go on to the priesthood — Father John Renggli, currently pastor of Holy Cross Parish in Tacoma.

Father Renggli credits the Edmonds Dominican Sisters, who taught at the parish school, with nurturing his vocation, particularly the school principal Sister Margaret Roth.

“She would encourage [us] altar boys to go to Vocations Days at the seminary,” he said.

Their pastor, Father Timothy Moyrian, who led the parish from 1952 to 1964, gave him the seminary entrance exam.

“He was a gentle, good, faithful priest,” Father Renggli recalled. “He would come out to our farm and take us kids swimming … He taught me how to swim.”

St. Joseph Parish, Chehalis
Founded: 1892
Households: 564
Address: 682 S.W. Cascade St.
Phone: 360-748-4953
Website: www.wlpcatholic.org

St. Joseph Parish, Chehalis
Pastors:
Father Gustave Achtergael, 1892
Father Herman Saindon, 1901
Father Francis Moens, 1903
Father Eugene Dufy, 1922
Father Andrew McGrath, 1926
Father Joseph Schmidt, 1930
Father Roger Furlong, 1936
Father Michael Quinlan, 1936
Father F. McCullough, O.M.I., 1944
Father Charles Kelly, 1945
Father Maurice Lee, 1949
Father Timothy Moyrian, 1952
Father Joseph Dakin, 1964
Father Paul Byrne, 1969
Father John McLaughlin, 1971
Father Leo Racine, 1984
Father John Bowman, 1985
Father Seamus Laverty, 1990
Father Tuan Nguyen, 1995
Father David Mulholland, 2006
Father Tim Ilgen, 2010
(*Administrator)

Built in 1959 and blessed and dedicated by Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly on June 12, 1960, St. Joseph Church was closed for services on Sunday, May 25, 1980 — the day a second eruption of nearby Mount St. Helens blanketed the city in ash.

The parish’s early church, then named after St. John the Evangelist, is flanked by Holy Rosary Academy on the right and the rectory on the left.