

PARISH PROFILE

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.



Father Tim Ilgen

"So it's vital for the people to step up and do what they can to help one another," Father Ilgen said. "And I see the parishioners of St.

Joseph's doing that."

The faith community of 564 households is one of six West Lewis-Pacific County Catholic parishes under his pastorate.

What jobs there are among the farmlands of Lewis County are not the high-paying type, notes 37-year parishioner Ed Stanton, a parish council member who formerly served on the parish finance council.

"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 central recovery and collection point. Parishioners helped flood victims clean up and rebuild their homes.

Even though some of the communities escaped the flood damages, all six parishes in the cluster came together to provide assistance, said Deacon Loren Lane, who serves four of the communities.

"We had people all over the place bringing food, bringing clothing, helping clean out buildings ... It was a hard time. But it was [also] a time that people came together to help support one another."

St. Joseph's role of helping the wider community is part of its tradition. Its parishioners were instrumental in founding the Chehalis food bank in 1988, a charter member



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.

of what is now the Lewis County Food Bank coalition. The coalition's eight food banks host approximately 5,800 client visits per month, said coalition treasurer Bonnie Pedersen, a St. Joseph parishioner.

Parish produced leaders

According to a parish history, St. Joseph's started as a mission in 1888 and was established as a parish in 1892. It has had 21 pastors since then. Initially named after St. John the Evangelist, the parish was renamed St. Joseph's in 1923 to avoid confusion with other churches in the region.

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 Rothis.

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

Their pastor, Father Timothy Moynihan, 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."

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St. Joseph Parish, Chehalis

Founded: 1892

Households: 564

Address: 682 S.W. Cascade St.

Phone: 360-748-4953

Website: www.wlpcatholic.org



Christ the King is depicted in stained glass in an upper window of the church.

PASTORS:

Father Gustave Achtergael, 1892

Father Herman Saindon, 1901

Father Francis Moens, 1903

Father Eugene Duffy, 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 Moynihan, 1952

Father Joseph Dakin, 1964

Father Paul Byrne, 1969

Father John McLaughlin, 1971

Father Leo Racine, 1984

Father John Bowman, 1985

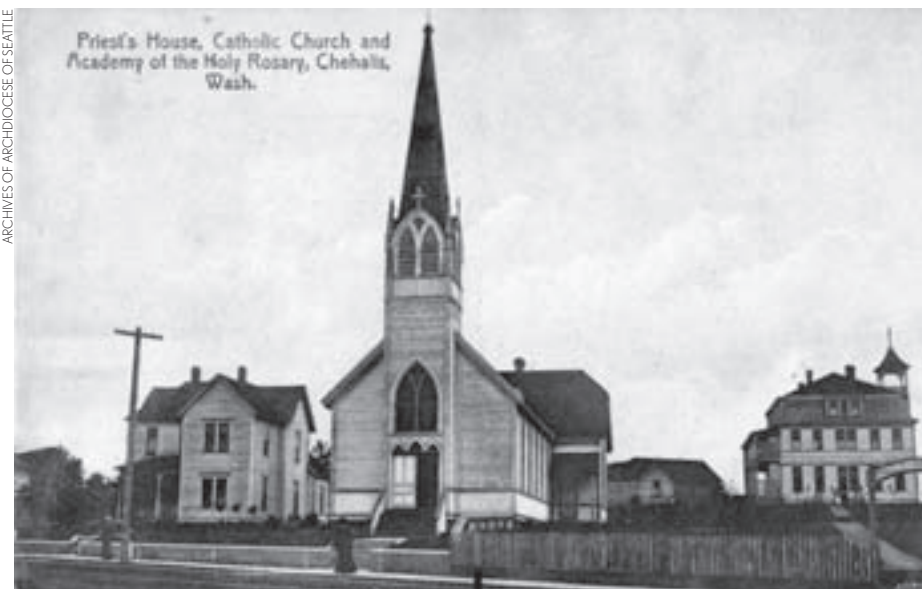
Father Seamus Laverty, 1990

Father Tuan Nguyen, 1995

Father David Mulholland, 2006

Father Tim Ilgen, 2010

(*Administrator)



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.