

PARISH PROFILE

Parish builds community in West Seattle

Rich, poor and in between, people say they're drawn to Our Lady of Guadalupe by its down-to-earth style, spiritual programs and strong liturgies and school

SEATTLE
BY TERRY MCGUIRE

Expect to see several hundred people from all over West Seattle standing outside Our Lady of Guadalupe Church the evening of Friday, Dec. 10.



Father Jack Walmsley

Then listen for their countdown: "10-9-8-7-6 ..."

As the final number is shouted out, Pastor Father Jack Walmsley or an honored parishioner will insert the plug into the outlet, and some 1,000 lights will illuminate the 80-foot Douglas Fir just outside the church, culminating the seventh annual Great West Seattle Christmas Tree Lighting.

The ceremony, which will include Christmas carols sung by choirs and hot chocolate and cookies supplied by the Knights of Columbus, is but one example of the parish's community-building efforts. The Halloween Party in October, the Over-65 Dinner held three times a year and the Community Meal for people in need that OLG hosts monthly in partnership with area churches are other ways in which the parish builds community within and outside its boundaries.

Among other things, Our Lady of Guadalupe is known for its adult education classes offered between Sunday morning Masses in the spring and fall. The popular classes draw from 80 to 100 people each Sunday



Parishioners waited a decade before their church building, which seats 750, opened in April 1970. Up to then, liturgies were held in the parish school hall, at Providence Mount St. Vincent a mile away, at a local gym, and in a public high school theater. The parish will conclude its 50th anniversary celebration this weekend at Masses surrounding the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

to hear guest speakers from Seattle University and elsewhere as they cover themes ranging from personal prayer, the sacraments and Scripture to the spirituality of aging and pastoral issues on death and dying.

Parishioners can further nourish their faith lives through the RSVP (Ritual, Scripture, Verse and Prayer) program, in which small groups meet in homes for six weeks in the fall and again in spring to pray and build community while focusing on the upcoming Scripture readings. The three-year-old program, which this past fall involved approximately 90 parishioners in seven groups, has "really taken off," said parish Pastoral Associate Peg Borkowski.

"Some of the groups have decided to continue meeting all year round," she said.

Father Stohr's legacy

The lively parish, named in honor of the Patroness of the Americas, has been celebrating 2010 with special energy, this being the 50th anniversary of its founding.

Established on Feb. 12, 1960 by Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly out of parts of Holy Rosary and Holy Family parishes, Our Lady of Guadalupe has been energized from the start.

Its founding pastor was Father Richard Stohr, founding director of the archdiocese's Catholic Youth Organization and a priest known for his boundless energy and ideas.

At OLG, he visited every parishioner's home and also the homes of the low-income residents in High Point, sold tons of ads for parish events such as the popular Italian Dinner, and even got a chauffeur's license so he could help drive the bus transporting students across town to their temporary quarters after a labor strike delayed the opening of the parish school.

Father Stohr, who died in 1995, had a way of endearing himself to everyone, friends said.

"He could get anybody to do anything," said parishioner Harry Langen, who still carries a picture in his mind of Father Stohr table-hopping after the bingo games, beer in one hand, chocolate doughnut in the other. Langen and his wife, Gloria, the school's librarian for 32 years, are founding members of the parish and have remained active volunteers.

Gloria Langen recalled how Father Stohr divided the parish into ten geographic districts, each with a women's guild. To help pay off the parish debt, the guilds sponsored dinners, rummage sales, bake sales and other fundraisers, while the men's booster club ran the bingo games and other activities. In one effort, Father Stohr had the guilds compete to be the first to cover the cost of a classroom for the parish school.

All their work together paid off — not just in retiring the debt but in building community, Gloria Langen said.



Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Seattle

Founded: 1960
Households: 740
Address: 7000 35th Ave. S.W.
Phone: 206-935-0358
Website: www.olgseattle.org

PASTORS:

- Father Richard Stohr, 1960
 - Father James Deady, 1964
 - Father Joe Buck, 1971
 - Father George McLean, 1974
 - Father Jan Larson, 1976
 - Father J. Paul Dalton, 1986
 - Father William Hallahan, O.M.I., 1995
 - Father John "Jack" Walmsley, 2002
- (Note: Deacon John LaRussa led the parish's day-to-day operations in the early 1990s as parochial minister.)



Founding pastor Father Richard Stohr joins parishioners in breaking ground for the parish school, which opened in 1962.



Pastor Father Richard Stohr consults with the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon, who staffed the school.

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"You get to know people better that way, and you felt community," she said.

Liturgies invite participation

The Langens say their parish has been blessed over its half century with good homilists and strong liturgies that invite participation. Given that Our Lady of Guadalupe was founded in the early years of the Second Vatican Council, the parish has always had a strong liturgical tradition in the spirit of Vatican II, Father Walmesley said.

He noted that former pastor Father Jan Larson, a former liturgy director for the archdiocese, "did a lot of education on liturgy and getting people moving in the right direction ... And then every priest that came after [him] kept promoting that ... in good ways."

Father Walmesley and Borkowski also appreciate their community's mix of races, cultures and economics,

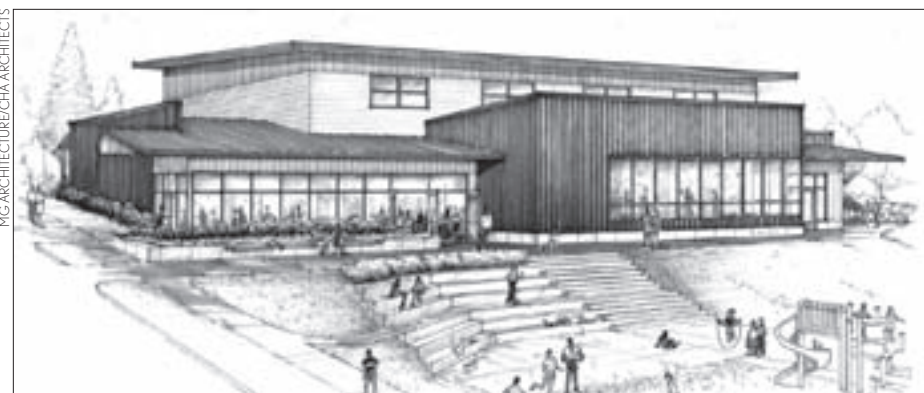
with Caucasians and parishioners of Filipino, Samoan and Vietnamese backgrounds making up the bulk of the parish demographics, joined by a few Hispanics, along with African immigrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Nigeria.

"We embrace a lot of different people ethnically and economically," Borkowski said, "and it builds a very strong community."

"It's a real mixture of ages," Father Walmesley said, adding that he's never been in a parish with so many single adults.

The church's location on 35th Avenue S.W. is noteworthy, the pastor said, because the roadway is a geographic divide between the poorer communities to the east and the more affluent communities overlooking Puget Sound to the west.

"We're right on what I call the



The parish hopes to break ground next year for its 10,000-square-foot Parish Life Center. It will provide a much-needed multipurpose facility housing a gym, gathering space and classroom area. To contribute to the Building for Our Future: The Next 50 Years Campaign, visit www.olgfuture.org.

neutral zone," he said, "so people don't feel like they're coming to one side or the other. They feel pretty welcome here."

The parish makeup has been bolstered in recent years by the renewal of the High Point area adjacent to the church, where low-income housing projects were razed and replaced by mixed-use housing. It has brought several dozen young families into the parish, and they've injected new life into the community, Father Walmesley said.

The parish boasts an active St. Vincent de Paul Society conference and the Knights of Columbus Father Richard Stohr Council 12175.

It's a "down-to-earth" parish where you "just feel really comfortable," said Norene Saldana, a Vincentian who with her husband, Jacob, has been a parishioner for some 30 years.

School a strength

Parish staff and parishioners point to the parish school, which opened in 1962 under the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon, as one of the faith community's major strengths.

Currently near capacity, with 257

students, the school reflects the parish's social-economic diversity, said Kristin Dixon, in her 11th year as principal.

"It's a very service-minded parish, and we are very much reflective of that at the school," she said.

For instance, the free Over-65 Dinner, which draws 200 to 300 senior citizens from around West Seattle, is a service project sponsored by the fifth-grade class. Students do the serving and provide the entertainment, and parents and other parishioners do the cooking.

In another effort that integrates the parish and school communities, students each Advent hold a Shoebox Liturgy, in which they've decorated and filled shoeboxes with gifts for people in need. Like all the other service projects at the school, the idea is to follow the example of the poor Mexican Indian Juan Diego, to whom Our Lady of Guadalupe is said to have appeared.

Just as he was a "regular guy" who was asked to do "something pretty extraordinary," so too is the school community made up of "ordinary folks called to do extraordinary things," Dixon said.

The parish will stay busy in 2011. If enough funds are raised, ground will be broken next summer for the approximately \$4.1-million, 10,000-square-foot Parish Life Center. A multipurpose facility to be built on the north parking lot, it will feature a large gathering space, kitchen, classroom area and a gymnasium that will give the parish CYO teams a real home court for the first time.



This undated photo shows youths from the parish CYO depicting the Nativity.