

PARISH PROFILE

# Bellevue parish celebrates milestone

*City's oldest Catholic community marks 100-year history with additions to school, pastoral services center as it seeks to fulfill role as 'downtown parish'*

BELLEVUE  
 BY TERRY MCGUIRE

A decade ago, newly arrived pastor Father Patrick Ritter could glance east from the Sacred Heart Parish campus and see 17 construction cranes reshaping the downtown Bellevue skyline just four blocks away.

When the current recession is over, those new condos, hotels and office developments should be full. And with the recent completion of the first phase of a capital campaign, Father Ritter and his faith community of 1,800 households will be ready to better serve them and others moving into the area.

The parish last Sunday gathered in celebration as Archbishop Alex J. Brunett blessed new and remodeled areas of the school and parish center — 39 rooms in all, including additions of approximately 7,600 square feet to the school and approximately 3,100 square feet to the parish center.

Designed with security and safety in mind, the \$8.7-million project included relocating the school administrative offices to a new addition so that the staff could monitor and control access to the building. Other improvements resulted in a new science lab and art studio, new multipurpose synthetic rubber flooring for the gym and a parish center addition to bring all the pastoral services together.

In addition, a new preschool has been launched and is expected to involve new families in parish life.

Everyone is "so proud" of the project, said Father Ritter, who is beginning his 11th year as pastor. And "we all did it together," he said, recalling the listening sessions and surveys that were held with parishioners over the past decade to prioritize goals.

"Always," he said, "the goal of a pastor is to create unity."

"I've been very impressed; we've had no dissenters," said Parish Administrator Kathleen Nordlund, who gave oversight to the project from start to finish.

Father Ritter said the lay leadership has been key to the campaign's success. Future phases call for a new parish hall, chapel and athletic complex, among other improvements.



The blessing Sept. 12 of new and renovated facilities was a day for celebration at Sacred Heart Parish in Bellevue. Flanking Archbishop Alex J. Brunett and Pastor Father Patrick Ritter are, from left: capital campaign chairs Greg and Tracey Russell; honorary chairs Rhoady and Jeanne Marie Lee; school Principal David Burroughs; parishioner Larry Fleishman, designer of the stained glass window of the Sacred Heart of Jesus behind them; and Vice Principal Connie Gray.

## Hundred-year history

Sacred Heart — where Father Ritter started his priestly ministry as an assistant back in the 1970s — is the oldest of the three Bellevue parishes. According to a parish history, it was founded as a mission in 1910, with Clyde Hill homesteaders Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Downey donating land for the church, school and convent.

During the 1950s Pastor Father Gerald Moore built the current church complex, opting to locate it "on a hill with a large tower so people would be drawn to God and to prayer," according to the capital campaign's video.

Today, with the development of downtown Bellevue, Sacred Heart is no longer a suburban parish.

"We are the new downtown parish," Father Ritter said, "and so we have built in such a way to prepare ourselves to begin new ministries for the downtown [users], the business people and the retirement community."

Parish demographics show that Sacred Heart parishioners have an average income of \$114,000, work for major companies such as Microsoft, Amazon, Paccar and Boeing, and are on the average ten years older than their counterparts in the 13 other parishes of the Eastside Deanery.

"Education is a large factor here," Father Ritter said. "We probably have 96 percent college educated people."

Longtime parishioners such as Lucille Elbert, who sent her four children through the parish school and who has been active on the parish council, parents club and St. Joan Guild, said Sacred Heart is as busy as ever.

"I find it to be a very active parish — many people involved in so many different activities," she said. A parishioner since 1965, Elbert helped lead a program for seniors that drew just a small group of older parishioners.

Then they started contacting parishioners 55 and older directly, and the ministry, renamed "Carpe Diem" ("Seize the Day") took off. A social

effort, it has some 160 members participating in activities such as bridge groups, potluck dinners, healing Masses, symphony series, field trips and other events.

At the other end of the age spectrum, nine teens from the Sacred Heart youth group returned in July from an annual mission trip to the Dominican Republic. They helped build houses and worked on building cultural and race relationships during their two weeks there, said Michael Murphy, who with his father, Tim, leads the parish youth ministry. The ministry sees from 50 to 80 young people receive the sacrament of confirmation each year, he said.

## Diversified group

Sacred Heart has a "well-diversified group in its makeup of parishioners," said Frank Powers, a 55-year parishioner. He was active with Boy Scouts Troop 431 when it was based at Sacred Heart, and he remains active in the parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society conference.

"It's very interesting to see. We have some of the richest people in the state of Washington and some of the poorest," Powers said. "So I see that diversity. And it's becoming more and more so each day."

Judy Barnes, who with her husband, Chuck, has been a parishioner since 1972, said the parish strives hard to be welcoming to newcomers.

"We really want to reach out to people that are just coming [in] and make them feel comfortable," she said.

Father Ritter said his parishioners have a strong Catholic faith and strong generational ties to their parish. He said they are generous with their gifts, financially and through their leadership skills.

Sacred Heart has been the largest parish contributor to Catholic Community Services the past five years, and the second largest to the Annual Catholic Appeal, he said.

The recently completed school and parish center campaign was an example of their willingness to share their gifts. The \$8.7-million project was

## Sacred Heart Parish, Bellevue

**Founded:** Mission, 1910; parish, 1946  
**Households:** 1,800  
**Address:** 9460 N.E. 14th St.  
**Phone:** 425-454-9536  
**Website:** www.sacredheart.org

## PASTORS:

- Father Patrick R. Donnelly, 1946
- Father Gerald T. Moore, 1949
- Father William E. Gallagher, 1971
- Father James E. Mallahan, 1974
- Father Harold F. Quigg, 1981
- Father Marlin J. Connole, 1988
- Father Patrick J. Ritter, 2000

completed despite the ongoing recession that took hold two years ago.

"People have said outside and inside the parish how much they've been impressed by the fact that we were able to raise the money," Father Ritter said.



Located on Main Street, the second Sacred Heart Church was succeeded in 1959 by the current church.



Staffed by the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Newark, Sacred Heart School opened in 1952.



The new school addition relocated the administrative offices to a place where access can be better controlled.