

PARISH PROFILE

Kitsap parish is a welcoming port in the storm

With deep roots and giving spirit, faith community is part of Bremerton's past, future

BREMERTON
 BY GREG MAGNONI

Deacon Bill Hamlin, a member of Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish for 60 years, calls the faith community a "stable anchor in the community" and says it cares for the poor and homeless who come to its doors "like a mother."

The parish has been both a nurturing presence and stabilizing influence in the Kitsap region's history for more than 100 years. And with the completion of a \$2-million renovation of its 55-year-old church — the third building since it was established in 1902 — the parish community is prepared to continue its role as an anchor and loving mother well into the future.

Described as "alive, vibrant and loyal" by Mary Snider, a parishioner since 1997, the parish and school are modern-day success stories within a faith community that cherishes tradition and maintains an active presence in the community.

"This place is hopping, all day, all night, every day of the week," said Snider. "There's always something going on here."

'We welcome everyone'

Located on the edge of Bremerton's downtown core at the top of a hill, the Romanesque church serves what Deacon Hamlin characterizes as a working-class parish, with many members who either work in the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard or are Navy personnel stationed in Bremerton. In addition to serving its largely blue-collar families, many of whom turn over every two to three years as Navy families come and go, the parish also dedicates itself to serving the city's poor.

"Being in the inner city, we get a lot of homeless and marginalized coming to our doors and we welcome everyone," said Deacon Hamlin, pastoral associate at Our Lady Star of the Sea. "We try to be there for everyone, kind of like a mother."

Under the patronage of Our Lady Star of the Sea, patroness not only of sailors but all who sail the stormy seas of life, the parish has built a strong Knights of Columbus council, an active San Lorenzo Guild and a St. Vincent de Paul chapter that ranks among the largest social service agencies in Kitsap County, according to Deacon Hamlin. The parish has a special devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and maintains perpetual adoration.

The Respect Life group and Pro-life Youth Committee have broad support, said Snider, who noted that the parish sent four buses to the annual March for Life in Olympia this year. The school is also a source of local pride. Last year its fourth-grade class achieved 100 percent on the state's WASL test for reading.

"It's there to have a faith-based education," Snider said. "We're proud to be a Catholic school."

New Look

The recent renovation of its church is helping re-energize the already active parish community that has seen its numbers fluctuate dramatically since World War II. The population of Bremerton ballooned to more than 80,000 immediately after the war but then declined, Deacon Hamlin said.

With establishment of new parishes in surrounding communities, Our Lady Star of the Sea dropped to less than 1,000 families. Recent years have seen steady growth, however, and the parish now counts nearly 1,500 households.

The dramatic makeover of the church took six months while members of the parish celebrated Mass in the school gymnasium, but by all accounts the project to modernize heating, sound and light systems was worth it. Remodeling dramatically brightened the formerly dark interior, according to Snider, project secretary for the renovation, and at the same time restored many features of the original design.

Our Lady Star of the Sea Pastor Father Derek Lappe credits his predecessor, Father Patrick Freitag, for initiating and overseeing the renovation, and said he believes the church's redesign would meet with the approval of Msgr. Joseph Cammerman, who was Our Lady Star of the Sea's Pastor for 58 years and built the current church in 1953 at a cost of \$500,000.

Parish History

Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish's history dates back to the first settlement in the Kitsap region.

After serving as a mission beginning in 1897, Our Lady Star of the Sea Parish was established in 1902 in the home of John Gibboney, and then moved into a one-room schoolhouse on Fourth Street.

In the 1920s, the second church and school on Sixth and Veneta opened in a shared two-story building, with the sanctuary on the upper floor. Our Lady Star of the Sea School opened its doors in 1926 with the arrival of three sisters from St. Dominic Convent in Everett. The parish school was torn down in 1996 and the new school opened in 1997.

Deacon Hamlin, whose mother was baptized in the parish in 1919 and started second grade the year the school opened, remembers when the present church was built in 1953.

"Monsignor (Cammerman) didn't like a lot of debt," he said, "so there were a lot of bazaars and bake sales to pay off the debt as rapidly as possible."

Msgr. Cammerman, who may hold the record for serving the longest continuous pastorate in the history of the archdiocese, left a lasting imprint on the parish, having overseen virtually every major construction project in the parish's long history. Under the pastorate of Father Lappe, Deacon Hamlin said the parish is currently doing a lot of community building with numerous social events and programs.

"Father Lappe has re-energized that whole thing," he said. "He has a lot of energy."

Our Lady Star of the Sea, Bremerton



2008



Circa 1970



Circa 1950



Fr. Derek Lappe



Msgr. Joseph Cammerman

Our Lady Star of the Sea's \$2-million renovation of its 55-year-old church in 2008 has given new life to an already vibrant and active parish. Renovations included lighting that brightened the previously dark interior. Msgr. Joseph Cammerman served as Our Lady Star of the Sea pastor from 1911 to 1969, possibly the longest continuous pastorate in the history of the Archdiocese of Seattle.

Pastors:

- Father Louis Allain 1902
- Father John O'Hagen 1908
- Msgr. Joseph Cammerman 1911
- Father Donald Conger 1969
- Father David White 1979
- Father Joseph Mitchell 1988
- Father Patrick Freitag 1999
- Father Derek Lappe 2008

Father Lappe, who was named pastor last summer, said completion of the church's beautification provides Our Lady Star of the Sea a foundation to build on for the future.

Although he acknowledged the deep faith of its parish members, "There's al-

ways room for a deepening of our faith and a deepening of our spirituality," he said.

"Now we continue with our mission to evangelize and proclaim the Gospel to people."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA