

PARISH PROFILE

Volunteers keep Poulsbo parish humming

With recent influx of young Hispanic Catholics, pastor says St. Olaf's strives to be a 'family-friendly' community

St. Olaf Parish, Poulsbo
Founded: 1968
Households: 1,100
Address: 18943 Caldart Ave. N.E.
Poulsbo, WA 98370
Phone: 360-779-1240
Web site: www.stolafschurch.org

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Statue of St. Olaf

BY TERRY MCGUIRE

St. Olaf's was named after the patron saint of Norway in tribute to Poulsbo's Scandinavian roots. But today it is welcoming newcomers from another part of the world.

Since the mid-1990s a steady influx of Hispanic families has been changing the face of the parish, according to pastor Father David Mayovsky, now in his seventh year of his first pastorate. Approximately 200 of St. Olaf's 1,100 households are Hispanic. And 80 percent of the newly arrived Hispanics are young adults under 25, with lots of children. Of this year's first Communion class, 32 of the 37 children are Hispanic.

With the influx, and with a focus on making St. Olaf's a "family-friendly" faith community, the parish has sought to provide a welcoming environment, the pastor said. A Spanish language Mass, celebrated by Father Mayovsky,

is held weekly. And parishioners assist in the sacramental preparation programs, offered in Spanish.

The Anglo and Hispanic communities have been "working very hard at growing together," the pastor said as he listed the bilingual liturgies and different ethnic celebrations designed to bring the Anglo, Hispanic, Filipino and Vietnamese communities together.

Other signs of St. Olaf's vibrancy include its strong commitment to stewardship and liturgy.

Father Mayovsky recalled that a few years back he had the unpleasant task of making drastic cuts in the parish staff to balance the budget. But rather than "divide and scatter," the parish community came together "after that and really embraced stewardship," he said. "Any of the ministries that we do are primarily done by my parishioners," he said, "everything from our lawn mowing ministry to our bulletin stuffers ... to youth ministers. It's all volunteer."

And "I have about 25 people in all of my consultative bodies, which for our size parish is outstanding to have that many people involved."

Beginning dates to 1968

Born out of what was then St. Peter Parish (now mission) in Suquamish, St. Olaf's was established in 1968 by Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly in response to the area's growth.

"The archbishop called me in one day and he says, 'OK, I was wondering what title we should give it,'" founding pastor Father Thomas O'Callaghan recalled last month, "and I said, 'Archbishop,

St. Olaf would be very fitting because of the Norwegian community (which settled Poulsbo) and St. Olaf (former king of Norway) is the patron saint of Norway."

Father O'Callaghan credits his predecessor at St. Peter Parish, Father Max Murray, with laying the groundwork for the parish by purchasing the land for the new church and raising a "huge amount" of the money. Archbishop Connolly, whose summer home in the Kitsap Peninsula community of Hansville made him a St. Peter's "parishioner," also contributed several thousand dollars to the campaign, Father O'Callaghan said. In addition, the archbishop gave the parish his own custom-made tabernacle. Crafted in Ireland and topped with a shamrock, it was donated in memory of his late parents, Father O'Callaghan said. Since then, "people have asked me, 'What's the connection between St. Olaf and St. Patrick?'"

Longtime parishioner Bill Schmidt remembers when the parish established a recycling center in 1974 to collect glass, metals and newspapers.

"All of the recyclables were delivered to Seattle, and the proceeds were earmarked for reduction of the huge parish debt," Schmidt said in an e-mail. He also recalled the time when their marble statue of St. Olaf was beheaded by vandals. "It was many months before the head was located in Poulsbo, and reattached to the body," Schmidt said.

At age 87, longtime parishioner Lucille Weisenberger has memories of Catholic life in Kitsap County dating back to the 1920s. The little house in the backyard of their farm was converted to a chapel in the 1930s, and Jesuit priests would come from Suquamish and celebrate Mass once or twice a month.

"We had neighbors that came and they weren't even Catholics," said Weisenberger, the mother of Father Gary Weisenberger, pastor of St. Martin of Tours Parish in Fife. She said the chapel was no longer needed after the construction of Miller Bay Road, which improved access to St. Peter's in Suquamish.

Area services rooted in St. Olaf's

Father Mayovsky notes that St. Olaf parishioners over the decades have played a major role in establishing many of the outreach services available in Kitsap County today, from the local food bank to childcare and preschool programs.

Among other ministries, St. Olaf's also hosts an active St. Vincent de Paul Society conference and a Knights of Columbus council.

The Knights council — named in honor of Msgr. Hugh O'Flaherty, the Catholic priest who helped prevent 4,000 Allied soldiers and Jews from being killed by the Nazis during World War II — has been busy the past four years repairing and upgrading historic St. Peter Mission Church, and its old rectory, which is now used for meetings, said past Grand Knight Thomas Musha.

Current Grand Knight Anthony Farrell, who came to St. Olaf's several years ago, said he is impressed both with the parish's strong youth program and a parish-wide willingness to dig in and get the job done, whatever the task.

"I find St. Olaf's is a highly organized and highly motivated" community, he said. "They're an extremely good blue-collar group that wants to get out and do things."



Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly prepares the cornerstone for St. Olaf Church in 1969.

40TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION CONTINUES

Starting with their patron's feast day last July 29, St. Olaf's has already celebrated its 40th anniversary with a parish festival featuring its different ethnic groups, a picnic and a founders' tea. The year-long celebration will conclude on Saturday, July 25 with an outdoor Mass followed by a dinner.

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The interior of St. Olaf's before the sanctuary was enlarged.

Pastors:

- Father Thomas O'Callaghan, 1968
- Father Richard Gallagher, 1973
- Father Robert Corrigan, 1985
- Father Robert Brazaskas, 1989
- Father James Meehan, SJ, 1991
- Father Hung Nguyen, 1996
- Father David Mayovsky, 2001



Fr. David Mayovsky