By Greg Magnoni

St. Ann Parish Tacoma is in the midst of yet another transition. And as Pastoral Assistant for Administration Kathy McSperitt said, “change is scary.”

From its establishment in 1924, St. Ann was built and supported by hard-working, blue-collar Irish, Czech and German immigrants who found a home in the Pierce County parish that lies in the shadow of Mount Rainier and above the shores of Commencement Bay.

Archbishop Alex J. Brunett announced earlier this month that St. Joseph and Holy Rosary parishes will be added to the four-parish cluster that includes St. Ann, Sacred Heart, St. John of the Woods and Visitation. As a result, St. Ann is making preparation for big changes.

The primary challenge for St. Ann is preparing to welcome the large Vietnamese community in Pierce County. Pictured above are images of St. Ann, the parish patroness, and Our Lady of Lavang that closed off four square blocks around the church. “The Our Lady of Lavang that closed off four blocks around the church. “The celebration,” said pastoral council chair Fr. Tuan’s credit, his expectations are positive conversations and planning. To Father Tuan’s credit, his expectations are positive conversations and planning. To work together to make the transition go smoothly,” Father Nguyen said, “but I pray the Holy Spirit helps and everyone [will] work together to make the transition go smoothly.”

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The Pierce County Korean Catholic Community formed a liturgy group and an elder group. “We would like to have more activities for youth,” Ling said. “I believe the youth are the ones who will bring their pressure on St. Ann’s current facilities, and Ling said the Vietnamese community hopes to work with the larger parish community to make renovations that will accommodate more programs for Vietnamese youth and their elders. “We would like to have more activities for elders. We would like to have more activities for elders because they are the key people who will support the Vietnamese youth,” said Ling.

Parish history

Before it became a parish, St. Ann was originally part of the territory assigned to Holy Rosary and was served by the Benedictine Fathers. The parish was established in 1924 just as Tacoma was becoming a modern city.

Bishop Edward J. O’Dea, appointed Father Michael Murphy as its first pastor, and Father Murphy immediately began the search for property on which to build a church. Prior to construction of the church, Mass was held in the home of Patrick Gallagher at South 67th and Yakima Avenue.

Once the site for the church was chosen at South 72nd and Park Avenue, work began on a tile and reinforced concrete structure finished in stucco. Both church and hall had a seating capacity of 300. The cost of the entire project including the rectory, which was completed in early 1925, was $30,000.

During the war years, the church served as a spiritual home to many of the soldiers and sailors from the East Coast and Midwest who were stationed at Fort Lewis and the local naval base. In its early years, Franciscan sisters from St. Ann’s Home provided religious training for the children of the parish.

Declaring that “No parish is complete without a school, and no sacrifice is too great when there is a question of providing for the proper education of God’s little ones,” Pastor J.F. Milner, the longest-serving pastor in St. Ann’s 85-year history, launched a school building fund in 1953.

The school, which was staffed mostly by Benedictine sisters, opened in the fall of 1955 with an enrollment of 321 students in eight grades. Due to changing demographics in the community that resulted in a significant decline in enrollment, the school closed in 1989.

In the 1960s the parish began acquiring property for the construction of a new, bigger church. In 1966 the design of the current church and rectory were approved and construction was completed in 1968.

BY GREG MAGNONI

St. Ann Parish Tacoma will nearly double in size when members of the Vietnamese community in Pierce County begin celebrating their regular Sunday Mass there July 5.

The original St. Ann Church (above) was completed in 1924 and was replaced by the existing structure in 1966. St. Ann Parish will nearly double in size when members of the Vietnamese community in Pierce County begin celebrating their regular Sunday Mass there July 5.

St. Ann Parish, Tacoma
Founded: 1924
Households: 384
Address: 7015 S. Park Ave.
TACOMA, WA 98408
Phone: 253-472-1360
E-mail: info@stann Tacoma.org
Web Site: www.catholic-tacoma.org/St_ann_home.htm

PASTORS:
Father Michael Murphy, 1924
Father Robert Dillon, 1932
Father Edmond Hayes, priest administrator, 1935
Father Maruice Galvin, 1936
Father J.F. Milner, 1943
Father Thomas Phelan, 1973
Father Sean Heneghan, 1983
Father John Koehler, priest administrator, 1994
Father Vincent Pastro, 1995
Father Tuan Nguyen, 2006

The need for parish facilities presents one of the primary challenges for the merger. The Vietnamese Catholic Community has numerous activities. Approximately 130 students attend language classes every Sunday for several hours followed by youth religious education. The community also has a choir, a liturgy group and an elder group.

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Another little parish

The 300 Vietnamese households joining the St. Ann faith community will nearly double the current number. “It’s a lot of preparation, a lot of work,” Father Nguyen said, “but I pray the Holy Spirit helps and everyone [will] work together to make the transition go smoothly.”

For the current number.

“My Ling, chair of the Vietnamese pastoral council who has attended Mass at Sacred Heart Parish for the past six years, said her community “knows it’s a challenge, but we’re excited to move to St. Ann because it has a facility that meets our needs.”

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