

Growing suburban parish maintains small town atmosphere

Auburn faith community famed for its Holiday Bazaar enters second century reaching out to diverse populations

'Feels like home'

Once home to dairy and berry farmers and railroad workers, Auburn is now a growing city of 65,000 people and large industries.

Still, Father Phuong Hoang, Holy Family's pastor from 1995-2006, remembers being impressed with the small town atmosphere he found in the parish community. Holy Family is a place "where people are involved not only on the parish level but they're also very active in the larger community," he said last week.

It's the kind of community where people call and check on you if they don't see you for a couple of days, said parishioner Catherine Banning, the parish's facilities manager. "This is my fourth parish in the archdiocese, and they're all wonderful," she said, "but this one just truly feels like it's home for me and my family."

Holy Family's Ethnic Heritage Council, which works with Hispanic, Filipino, Vietnamese and other cultural groups to share their cultures and spirituality with the rest of the parish, was founded under Father Hoang in response to the area's growing diversity.

"We participate in any way we can...to bring the community together," said Nora Guzman-Dryseth, the council's chair. "We do a lot of food events."

Every Dec. 12th, the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the parish hosts a group of parishioners from neighboring Holy Spirit Parish that prays the rosary at Holy Family, then sets out on foot on an approximately 10-mile procession back to Holy Spirit Church.

Auburn's St. Vincent de Paul Society store, founded by parishioners in 1950, last year served more than 3,000 adults and 2,000 children with food, clothing, housewares and other assistance, said the society's council president Dave Patnode.

Many gifts

Holy Family also hosts a weekly Sunday Mass for the region's Sacred Heart Vietnamese Catholic community. The afternoon Mass, which draws from 300 to 400 people from Auburn, Federal Way, Kent and other surrounding communities, is preceded by religious education

Holy Family, Auburn

Founded: 1907

Households: 1,170

Street Address: 505 17th St. S.E., Auburn

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 290,
Auburn, WA 98071-0290

Phone: (253) 833-5130

Web site: www.holyfamilyauburn.org

Holy Family Pastors

Rev. P.A. Flavin, 1907

Rev. W.B. Hannon, 1911

Rev. Eugene Duffy, 1912

Rev. Hugh Lynch, 1922

Rev. J.E. O'Brien, 1931

Rev. Antonius Fischer, 1932

Rev. Joseph Schmidt, 1936

Rev. Michael Meade, 1949

Rev. John Duffy, 1960

Rev. Andrew Prouty, 1970

Rev. Patrick Godley, 1978

Rev. Phuong Hoang, 1995

Rev. Otto Koltzenburg, priest

administrator, 2006-present



Clockwise from top: The old Holy Family Church served the community from 1911 to 1962; Archbishop Alex J. Brunett enjoys a Vietnamese community dragon dance at the parish's centennial celebration Feb. 16; the new church, dedicated in 1963, seats 750 worshippers.

classes and Vietnamese language classes for the young people, said Matt Nguyen, vice chair of the Vietnamese council.

A parishioner since 1979, Nguyen remembers when the Masses were held only quarterly or monthly, depending on the availability of a priest. He said the Vietnamese Catholic community is blessed to have "access and utilize the facilities" at Holy Family.

Holy Family's Holiday Bazaar, held the first Saturday in November, has been a popular event with the wider Auburn community for decades. Proceeds are split between the parish and school. "We have 70 to 80 vendors," Banning said, "and we have a white elephant sale that's a huge draw. We call it our parish garage sale."

Other popular gatherings include the Women Society's spring fashion show, which helps Pregnancy Aide, and the Knights of Columbus Lenten Fish Dinners. Also, the Auburn food bank uses the parish facilities for holiday food distribution.

Parish History

Though established as a parish by Bishop Edward O'Dea on Christmas Day 1907, the local Catholic community dates to 1880 when an Indian Mission Chapel was built near Third and R Streets S.E. in the town of Slaughter, renamed Auburn in 1893.

Occasional Masses were held in the chapel and then in public halls until members from among the parish's 20 founding families started work on a church on the corner of 1st S.W. and E St. under Father P.A. Flavin. The church opened in 1909.

The dedicated pastors that followed included Father Antonius Fischer. Despite having contracted pneumonia, Father Fischer left his own sick bed to minister to the sick and subsequently died in 1936.

Auburn's growing population following World War II prompted pastor Father Michael Meade to add extra Masses and to purchase the current church site in 1959. Under the leadership of his successor,

Father John J. Duffy, the current church, school and other facilities were opened in the early 1960s, with parishioners surpassing the minimum building fund goal of \$200,000. Holy Family School, which opened in 1964, has more than 230 students in pre-k to 8th grade today.

In January 1993 the "Inauguration Day Windstorm" tore off part of the church roof, soaking the pews and carpet with rain water. "We had to remodel the whole place," then-pastor Father Patrick Godley recalled last week. The work included a liturgical update that placed the altar much closer to the assembly in the 750-seat church.

(Text by Terry McGuire drawn from interviews, parish history and Archdiocese of Seattle Archives.)