St. Cecilia Parish: Welcoming environment for new families

“Listening, prayer and sharing”

STANWOOD
BY ARMANDO MACHADO

Parishioners of St. Cecilia Church in Stanwood remember the special occasion when the relics of St. Therese of Lisieux arrived six years ago. Father Matthew Williams, OCD, parish pastor, said in a recent interview: “It was a time for the people to increase their faith and to get closer to God.”

And members of the church recall the community’s elation when the parish hall was built in 2001. “It strengthened the community life of the people to a deeper level, in that we have been able to gather as a faith community more often,” noted Father Williams, who is serving his second term as pastor of St. Cecilia.

He said the parish, established in 1981 after decades as a mission community, “combines the stability of a longtime parish with a welcoming environment for new families...The years of outreach to the poor have been outstanding.”

Parish ministries include the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Women’s Guild, the Knights of Columbus, the Evangelization Ministry, Faith Formation and Youth Ministry.

The parish community has always been predominantly people of Norwegian and Scandinavian descent. “It’s been like that for 98 years,” Father Williams said. The mission community, also called St. Cecilia, was created in 1908.

The church, which celebrated its 25th anniversary as a parish last year, has had and continues to have a mix of members from white collar and blue collar families.

The Caviezel and Bloom families

St. Cecilia Church has been the home parish for many years of James and Maggie Caviezel, parents of the actor Jim Caviezel, who portrayed Jesus in the film “The Passion of the Christ.”

James Caviezel is a chiropractor in Mount Vernon, where his children were raised and where the family belonged to Immaculate Conception Parish.

St. Cecilia Parish is also the faith community of the Bloom family — relatives of Father Phil Bloom, who is pastor of Holy Family Parish in Seattle, and who worked as a missionary in South America for six years.

Mary Ann C. Kmetz said that when she and her husband joined the parish more than 10 years ago, they felt “there was a real sense of the Holy Spirit in the community...The parish community means the world to us, because they are our extended family.”

Kmetz, the mother of three and grandmother of five who has served as music director since 2001, noted that she sees the music and the liturgy as one, adding, “We actually sing the liturgy; I think it is an added gift, whereby we can praise the Lord twice.”

From mission to parish

While it was a mission, St. Cecilia Church served the community first with a small building constructed in 1908 and later with a 1964 building, which still serves as the parish church.

In July 1981, St. Cecilia Church was declared the newest parish in the Archdiocese of Seattle — and Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen appointed Father William Treacy as pastor. A rectory was built the following year.

In 1999, Father Williams was transferred back to California and Father Paul Koenig, a Carmelite from California, was appointed St. Cecilia pastor. And in 2005, the two priests switched again, with Father Williams returning as St. Cecilia pastor.

The St. Cecilia mission church began with 14 families in 1908. This year, after being a parish for 25 years, the church has about 650 registered households.

Father Treacy, the first pastor, said the Carmelite presence is an important part of the parish history. “I was the one who invited the Carmelites to come in and take over,” Father Treacy said. “The lay ministers were very responsible in visiting the sick and other outreach activities...And I was helped by Deacon Don Hanika — he was a tremendous help to me...There was a very generous response to build the rectory.” During his years as pastor, Father Treacy noted, he celebrated Mass at a Lutheran church on nearby Camano Island, where there is no Catholic church.

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Father Treacy, who has an active ecumenical ministry and is now a senior priest with the archdiocese, served as St. Cecilia pastor until 1989, when Carmelite priests came to St. Cecilia and Father James Geoghegan, OCD was appointed as administrator. Father Geoghegan became pastor the following year. The Carmelite Order formed the Institute of Spirituality two doors from the church, and several years later purchased the home between the church and the institute, calling that structure the St. John House.

In 1996, Father Geoghegan was transferred to California to serve the Carmelite community, and Father Matthew Williams arrived from California and was appointed pastor.

With Father Williams, St. Cecilia entered a new phase of parish life with a fund drive for the parish hall.

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