

PARISH PROFILE

St. Louise Parish: A living example of Vatican II

Community exemplifies diversity, ecumenism, outreach

BELLEVUE
 BY BARBARA MULVEY LITTLE

St. Louise de Marillac was founded in February 1960 by Archbishop Thomas Connolly under the leadership of Father Howard Lavelle. Seven hundred families from Sacred Heart Parish in Bellevue began the new parish, which grew rapidly.



Fr. Howard Lavelle

Temporary and permanent buildings were built on the ten-acre parcel of land donated by a local developer. A school was built in 1961 and expanded in 1964. In 1976, Father Lavelle was transferred. Because the parish was so large, priests from the Claretian order staffed St. Louise's until 1984 when leadership by diocesan priests returned. Major remodeling of the church building was undertaken in 1980 with further renovations completed in 2006.

The parish's continued vibrancy is evident in the involvement of its nearly 4,000 families today and in the numbers of ministries led by the laity.

Father Lavelle grew this community,



Parishioners and parish staff break ground for St. Louise parish in 1960.

Parish Snapshot

Founded: 1960

Registered Households:
 approximately 4,000

Address:
 141 156th Ave., SE
 Bellevue, WA 98007

Phone: (425) 747-4450

Pastors:
 Rev. Howard Lavelle, 1960-76
 Rev. Al Connors, C.M.F., 1984-85



Rev. Horacio Yanez, 1985-98
 Rev. Phil Wallace, 1998-2002

Rev. Tom Belleque, 2002-present



to become empowered people, "Vatican II people." He knew the success of the parish would depend on lay ministries. "From its beginning, the laity had a great sense of ownership that the ministries belong to them. I think that is very healthy," said former pastor Father Phil Wallace.

He continued, "You can drive into this parking lot on any day and at any hour, and there are cars here." Twenty-five baptisms on a recent Saturday afternoon and 250 first communicants this May are further evidence of the life of this community. "On Sunday mornings, classrooms for religious education of children are full to overflowing," said Sondra Sciola, Pastoral Assistant for Children's Faith Formation & Family Life.

Church at the crossroads of the world

Located only a short distance from the Crossroads Mall in Bellevue, this parish is also at the crossroads of the world. The multi-ethnic community includes families from India, Africa, the Philippines, Mexico, Vietnam, Cambodia, and a variety of Asian and Latin American countries.

"No matter who you are, where you come from, you are a sister or brother here. There is a continuing stream of

new cultures," Father Wallace said. Sister Amalia Comacho, CSJP agrees, "My image of this parish is like the Statue of Liberty in New York - welcoming. People know we're here, they come and they feel safe." Sister Amalia's ministry serves St. Louise's large Spanish speaking community. Mass, sacramental preparation and RCIA are all offered in Spanish.

Leadership in ecumenism

Another unique dimension of St. Louise is its long standing Covenant relationship with Bellevue's Episcopal Church of the Resurrection and the Cross of Christ Lutheran Church. In 1989, they signed a "Covenant agreement" to recognize the working of the Holy Spirit in each other's communities. They pledge mutual respect and to work toward Christian unity. The communities regularly worship and pray together (Stations of the Cross, Advent services, communal blessing of palms), and host an ecumenical vacation bible school. They renew their covenant yearly during a Covenant Liturgy. The communities also gather with the congregation at Temple B'nai Torah for an annual thanksgiving celebration. "We have made such rich friendships," said Kathy Riley, Pastoral Assistant for Pastoral Care.

Outreach is a way of life at St. Louise. From its inception, the parish has tithed 10 percent of its income for the poor. Children learn early with their own stewardship committee that collects money and then researches and recommends how it is spent for ministry to other children. "It is a wonderful program, but it is more than a program; it is the concept of St. Louise," said Sciola.



Fr. Tom Belleque

Current pastor Father Tom Belleque has a great love and passion for orphans. With his leadership, the parish works with Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH), an agency that operates orphanages in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean. Each year Father Belleque organizes people (including families) to work for and play with the children of NPH during the summer trips.

In fitting tribute to its namesake, the parish has numerous ministries, including care for youth, the sick, lonely, homeless, bereaved and poor. St. Louise's also maintains a school for kindergarten through eighth grade with about 450 students.