

PARISH PROFILE

United, caring community uses gifts to reach out

Sacred Heart Parish, former home to many Slavic Fairhaven fishing families, has experienced a century of growth spurred by immigration

BELLINGHAM
 BY ARMANDO MACHADO

According to parish historical records, the creation of Sacred Heart Parish, Bellingham initially was met with resistance from the archdiocese because of the existence of Assumption Parish, which had been established in 1889 in the northern part of Bellingham.

But the fledgling parish eventually was formed because of the determination and strong wishes expressed by Catholics living in the southern fishing community of Fairhaven. In 1905, about a third of Assumption parishioners left to become the first members of Sacred Heart Church.

Although its beginnings were marked by the predictable growing pains of an expanding population, Sacred Heart Parish celebrated its centennial and 100 years of faith and service in 2005.

According to the parish mission statement, parishioners at Sacred Heart Parish, Bellingham seek to witness the presence of God in their community as a family "bound together by the Word and Eucharist."

Parishioners also look to work together "through worship, education, service, social activities, and stewardship," using their gifts and talents to reach out to others.

United, caring people

Mary Spencer founded the Sacred Heart Health Team in 2001 and serves as the team's coordinator. The Health Team is a resource to health programs in the area providing spiritual counseling related to health concerns.

"It is tremendous," Spencer said of the parish community where she has been a member for seven years. "I've never seen such caring people as I've seen in this community. I feel that they are very much together, they are united."



Father Qui-Thac Nguyen

Father Qui-Thac Nguyen became the priest administrator for Sacred Heart Parish in July 2007 after serving as parochial vicar for the parish of more than 700 registered households the previous year. The staff includes Deacon Larry Gorman

Sacred Heart Parish

Founded: 1905

Registered Households: 712

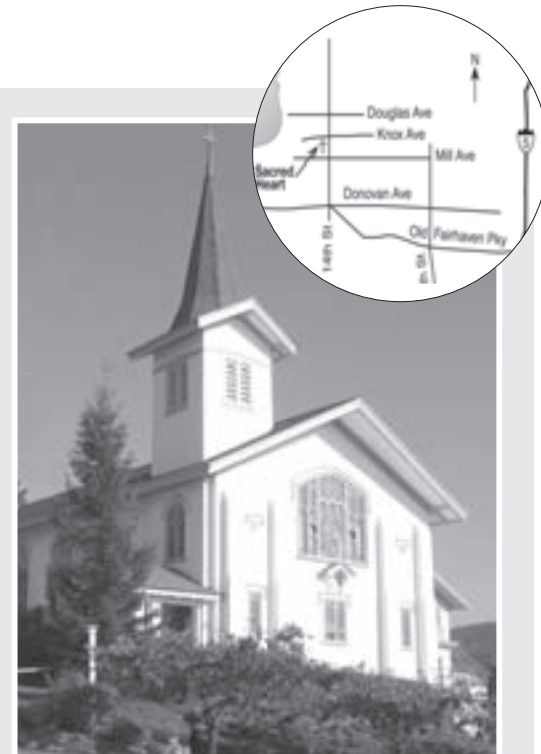
Priest Administrator: Rev. Qui-Thac Nguyen

Address: 1110 14th St., Bellingham, WA 98225

Phone: (360) 734-2850

Pastors:
 Rev. James A. O'Hagan, 1905
 Rev. William Noonan, 1908
 Rev. Daniel A. Hanley, 1910,

Rev. Stephen J. Carmody, 1912
 Rev. Peter R. Smyth, 1944
 Rev. A.J. Shaughnessy, 1949
 Rev. Thomas R. Hanley, 1955
 Rev. Jan Bogusz, 1964
 Rev. Patrick O'Brien, 1974
 Rev. Jerome Dooley, 1976
 Rev. Patrick Ritter, 1981
 Rev. David Linehan, 1984
 Rev. Steve Sallis, 1988
 Rev. Gary Morelli, 1993
 Rev. Joseph DeFolco, 1997
 Rev. Frank Schuster, 2001
 Rev. David Mulholland, 2003
 Rev. Frank Schuster, 2006



and the pastoral administrator, Pamela Wilson.

"I think that they are very generous, not only in finances, but also in the time that they put into the ministries," Father Nguyen said of Sacred Heart parishioners.

"They are also very generous in how they've received the various priests who have served here," he said.

Father Nguyen, who was born and raised in Vietnam, also noted the good works of all the parish ministries, including the Prayer Shawl ministry. Women in the group knit shawls for the homebound, praying for them as they knit. They also knit shawls for people grieving the loss of loved ones.

The parish's annual Potpourri of Art draws artists from throughout the Northwest and is one of the parish's largest events for support and service.

Parish history

Bishop Edward J. O'Dea established Sacred Heart Parish in 1905. The first Mass was celebrated on Nov. 12 by the first pastor, Father John A. O'Hagan, in a vacant store at 14th and Mill streets that served as the first church building.

Less than a year later, the former Bellingham Herald building was purchased and served as the church until the present building was constructed in 1913 at 14th and Knox.

Bishop O'Dea dedicated the church the same year on Oct. 5.

Father O'Hagan served as pastor until 1910 and was succeeded by Father Daniel A. Hanley, who was pastor until 1912. Father Stephen Carmody succeeded him as pastor and remained in that position for 32 years until 1944, making him the parish's longest-serving pastor.

"The rapid growth of south Bellingham has been reflected in the increase on membership of the Sacred Heart Parish and the parish, under the splendid leadership of Father Carmody, has steadily increased," parish historical material states. "The debt has been reduced and improvements have been made.... This has all been accomplished by the self-sacrificing efforts of the pastor (Father Carmody)."

In 1921, the present rectory was built. Prior to that, the priests lived at the original St. Joseph Hospital. Land acquired before the Great Depression for a Catholic school is now the parish parking lot.

Children from the parish attend Assumption School, located north at the Assumption Church site. The Sacred Heart parish hall was built in 1962 under the direction of Father Thomas R. Hanley (no relation to Father Daniel Hanley).

Immigration spurs growth

In the early decades, few Sacred Heart members attended Mass at Assumption and vice versa, largely due to neighborhood loyalty.

Parish borders in those days normally were based on high school boundaries, and each end of the city had a high school until Fairhaven High School burned down in 1936.

The high school consolidation after the fire apparently took away some of the differences between Sacred Heart Parish and Assumption Parish.

According to local Catholic Church history, the Sacred Heart community, like the Assumption area, had many early members from Ireland, Germany and French-speaking Canada. Starting around 1915, many families from the Adriatic coast of Yugoslavia joined the Sacred Heart community. Many were fisherman in their native land, and soon began a Slavic fishing community in the Fairhaven area.

They eventually became the main ethnic group of Sacred Heart, resulting in many of the church liturgies having Slavic influence. Today, an ethnic mix remains including people of Croatian, Polish and Vietnamese descent, although today the parish has somewhat more white-collar than blue-collar workers.