Chinese Catholic community strong in faith and family

 początku according to a community history. groups with other Chinese Catholics, to and Seattle University met in small studying at the University of Washing-dates back to 1970 when Chinese priests the Seattle Chinese Catholic Community History dates to 1970

SEATTLE

Jones

Father Clarence

Some speak Cantonese. Others speak Mandarin. Their priest, mean-while, Oratorian Fa-ther Clarence Jones, speaks only English, save for a few stan-dard Mass responses in Chinese that the community has taught him, such as “The Lord be with you,” and “Let us pray.”

But somehow it all works when the Seattle Chinese Catholic Community (SCCC) gathers for worship and fel-lowship at Our Lady of Mount Virgin Church.

The community of approximately 100 members, many of them recent or long-ago immigrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong and China, celebrated its 25th anniversary Nov. 4 with a Mass and reception with Archbishop Alex J. Brunett.

The archbishop, making note of their immigrant roots, praised the Chinese Catholic community for its strong faith, saying they and other Asian Catholics who’ve endured communist rule in their homelands know what it’s like to have to struggle to preserve their faith.

“That’s one of the great gifts you bring to us — to make us aware not to take our faith for granted, not to live in a culture and let people slowly take (away) piece by piece the religious rights and practices that we have,” the archbishop said.

He also extolled the community’s strong sense of family life. “Again, it’s something we raised in America… sometimes forgot,” he said.

History dates to 1970

Though formally established in 1982, the Seattle Chinese Catholic Community dates back to 1970 when Chinese priests studying at the University of Washing-ton and Seattle University met in small groups with other Chinese Catholics, according to a community history. In 1982 Msgr. John Chi was appointed the community’s founding chaplain. A Mandarin-speaking native of Honan, China, he shepherd-ed the community for the next 16 years. Highly venerated in the community, he has served as a valuable conduit to the wider church, Archbishop Brunett said.

Today, the community gathers every Sunday at noon in their statue-laden church for a Mass celebrated by Father Jones, Our Lady of Mount Virgin’s pa-rochial vicar since 2005.

Some come from as far away as Au-burn and Everett. Upon entry, worshippers can check out small radio trans-mitters through which an interpreter translates the Mass into their dialect. The homilies alternate. One week Fa-ther Jones preaches in English; the next Sunday the community’s deacon, Dea-con Joseph Yuen, delivers it in Chinese — usually Cantonese.

The homilies alternate. One week Father Jones preaches in English; the next Sunday the community’s deacon, Deacon Joseph Yuen, delivers it in Chinese — usually Cantonese.

The community boasts a variety of ministries, including active youth and young adult groups, bible sharing and faith sharing groups, a Legion of Mary, Family Rosary, monthly Taize services, a children’s liturgy, a monthly potluck, and a Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) program. Cultural events include a mid-autumn festival and an-cestral veneration in the New Year.

But the SCCC is especially known for its evangelization as it strives to alert newcomers to its presence. For in-stance, the young adult group recently sponsored the community’s third evan-gelization concert, drawing some 100 people. The community also sponsors a booth each year at the International District Summer Festival Fair to make its presence known.

Moreover, members of the commu-nity take it upon themselves to invite friends and acquaintances to give the community a look.

Sharing the faith

Lisa Lee, a community council member in charge of faith formation, remembers when she emigrated to the U.S. from Taiwan in 1989. Though baptized Catholic as an infant, she was baptized Catholic as an infant, she was recruited by a Protestant church upon her arrival here and she stayed in it for about a year, unaware like many new immigrants that there was a local Cath-olic Chinese community.

Protestant churches have many more people trained in outreach to newcom-ers, Lee said. “That’s why when we go to a local parish I don’t feel at home,” she said, “because most parishioners there don’t have that kind of train-ing to really reach out to people who are different from you.”

“I feel I’m obligated to make our community a home to other Chinese people and introduce them to Christ.”

Father Jones admires the commu-nity’s evangelizing spirit.

“They’re very welcoming,” he said, “and they are very serious about shar-ing the faith of Jesus with others… helping people to grow personally but also in a very concrete communal sense of what it means to be members of the Body of Christ.”

One issue the community faces daily is the language variance, said Linda Kwong, the SCCC president, who grew up in Hong Kong. With approximately 60 percent of the membership versed in Cantonese and 40 percent in Mandarin, it’s a challenge to try to fully under-standing what the other dialect is say-ing, she said. In bible study, for instance, “we need to have two groups.”

There’s also concern over the young-er generation knowing English but not the mother tongue.

The “younger generation (is) more comfortable speaking English,” noted Catherine Chi, a member of the young adult group.

“That’s why we try to come back to the parish and practice our own (moth-er) language,” said Peggy Yuan, another member of the group.