MOUNT VERNON
BY ARMANDO MACHADO

With the regional office in Mount Vernon, Skagit Valley Catholic Churches is comprised of five parishes: Immaculate Conception in Mount Vernon, St. Charles in Burlington, Sacred Heart in La Conner, Immaculate Heart of Mary in Sedro-Woolley, and St. Catherine in Concrete.

The parishes were combined as a regional faith community in the mid-1990s under then-pastor Father Paul Magnano.

“They serve above and beyond,” Joseph Buechele said of staff members and volunteers who lead regional and parish-level ministries. Buechele is SVCC pastoral assistant for administration and development.

“They have a commitment to having a Christian environment” available to many people, he added, noting that faith-based education of children is a priority at Immaculate Conception Regional School and in religious education programs at the parishes.

Buechele noted that coordinators and members of the ministries bring their gifts and talents to programs designed to “make the community a better place and keep the Catholic commitment to Christianity alive.”

Skagit Valley Catholic Churches has been served by some priests from abroad, including Mexico and Africa. “This has helped us see the universal or catholic dimension of the church in very practical terms,” the pastor, Father Pat McDermott said last week. As for the parishes, he said he always respects the uniqueness of each of them. “Each of our valley parishes,” he said, “has its own special personality that it shares with the others and the local community.”

Many of the ministries are regional, serving and attracting people from all the parishes. They include the valley-wide Confirmation Program. There is also Immaculate Conception Regional School (Preschool-8) in Mount Vernon, and the St. Joseph Center, which serves as the school’s gymnasium and for multiple SVCC uses, including Mass.

Father McDermott said that the five parishes, through support from students and families, help make the school “a top-rated educational resource for the whole community.” The school was founded in 1949 – it has a current enrollment of 259. The principal is Kathleen Cartee. St. Joseph Center was built in 1999.

The regional ministries include the Migrant Ministry Project, which features the high-profile Youth Migrant Project. Every summer, volunteers assist visiting youth groups as they minister to the Skagit Valley migrant community and bring donated food and clothing.

Other regional ministries include the Health Ministry-Parish Nurse Program, Vacation Bible School for elementary school children, The Edge for youths in grades 6-8, and Vortex for high school students.

A new SVCC ministry is SacraMentors, a men’s spirituality program. Another new regional ministry is the Young Adults Program, a lectionary-based, faith-sharing group for couples and singles ages 21-35.

In order to serve Skagit Valley’s many Latinos, the weekend liturgy schedule includes two Spanish Masses at St. Charles and two at Immaculate Conception. And there are church programs offered in Spanish, including religious education.