

Seattle parish plays prominent role in Wallingford's history

The past

The parish named after the founder of the Benedictine Rule was established on Aug. 1, 1906 by Bishop Edward O'Dea and extended some 30 miles north from North Seattle to the Everett city limits.

Its founding pastor was a Benedictine, Father Ulric Sheffold, who died less than three years into his pastorate after contracting meningitis while anointing a trapped sewer line worker.

For the next 92 years the parish was led by the missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, who became known for their style of openness, welcoming, spirituality and concern for society's marginalized people.

The Edmonds Dominicans opened the school in 1908 and went on to educate the parish children for some eight decades.

The original church building, opened in 1907, housed the church, school and parish hall. The school moved into its current building in 1925. In 1934, due to the deteriorating condition of the church, the pews were moved into the school auditorium and that space served as the church for the next 21 years, until the current church — with its distinctive square tower and detailed Rose Window symbolizing the "Mystical Circle of Life" — was dedicated in 1955.



The Great Wallingford Wurst Festival has become a popular community-wide event that helps support the parish school. This year's fest will be Sept. 15-16.

The present



Rev. Steve Sallis

Pastor since 2002, Father Steve Sallis has seen his parish of 800 households grapple with rocketing housing prices just like other Seattle neighborhoods. "A lot of people just can't afford to live in

Wallingford, and they have to move," he said of small-family homes now valued at upwards of a half-a-million dollars. But the parish population has stabilized, "and now we're growing slowly again."

Wallingford has evolved over the decades from a blue collar to a white collar neighborhood, he said. And with some 80 restaurants and other businesses packed into a small area, it's a community where people are able to walk rather than drive.

"What's really nice is we have hundreds of people walk by our church each day," Father Sallis said. Catholics and non-Catholics, they stop at the church bulletin board to peruse centennial photos and other news. "It's been a really wonderful way to share our parish with the community," he said.

St. Benedict's has played a prominent role in the area's history through its school, founded almost 100 years ago, and through the school's annual Wallingford Wurst Festival, which is in

its 24th year.

Jan Barrett, pastoral assistant for administration, and her husband, Tom, have been parishioner for 40 years, sending all seven of their children through the parish school. They were among the approximately 20 young parish families that launched the festival after borrowing the fundraising idea from an Everett parish.

"All our pastors have been very supportive of the Wurst Festival," she said, "and I think most of them (including Father Sallis) have taken their turn in the dunk tank."

Among other ministries, St. Benedict's has an active Cabrini Ministry group and a St. Vincent de Paul Society conference.

Last fall, when families dislodged by Hurricane Katrina were scattered about the country, St. Benedict's stepped forward and provided its rental house rent-free for a year to a New Orleans single mother with two young children. The parish school took in her school-age daughter, tuition free.

"I think one of the characteristics that is always mentioned (about the parish) is that it's very open and welcoming and inclusive," Barrett said. "People really find a home here."

Looking back at the parish's roots, Father Sallis notes that the "ministries and the needs are much different now than they were 100 years ago." For example, parishioners today minister

ST. BENEDICT PARISH, SEATTLE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Sunday, Aug. 6

Mass: 10 a.m.

President: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett

Followed by annual parish picnic at Woodland Park

PASTORS

- Rev. Ulric Sheffold, OSB, 1906
- Rev. Eugene Dorgan, OMI, 1910
- Rev. Andrew Kunz, OMI, 1923
- Rev. Thomas Wood, OMI, 1927
- Rev. Charles McCarthy, OMI, 1929
- Rev. William Robbins, OMI, 1935
- Rev. Francis O'Brien, OMI, 1941
- Rev. Leo Chambers, OMI, 1945
- Rev. Edward McHugh, OMI, 1950
- Rev. Henry Conrad, OMI, 1956
- Rev. Francis McHugh, OMI, 1963
- Rev. Edward Collins, OMI, 1969
- Rev. Andrew Harris, OMI, 1975
- Rev. Owen Hope, OMI, 1981
- Rev. William Hallahan, OMI, 1988
- Rev. Paul Waldie, OMI, 1995
- Rev. Steve Sallis, 2002

with people with AIDS and are linked to a "companion parish" in Zambia for whom St. Benedict's is raising \$50,000 to build a parish center. The check will be presented at the centennial Mass.

Just as in the past, "we're continuing to respond to where the Spirit is leading us now," Father Sallis said.

Memories

St. Benedict School's annual The Great Wallingford Wurst Festival, which will mark its 24th year Sept. 15 and 16, now raises some \$50,000 each year for the school's general operating fund and has become a popular community event.

So popular in fact that one year they realized they were going to run out of the festival's namesake sausage

ST. BENEDICT, See page 16



The parish dedicated its current church building on Oct. 6, 1955.

ST. BENEDICT PARISH

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ST. BENEDICT: Memories of the smokers and the parish as a second home

Continued from page 3

with still a day left to go. The sausage, made from a secret recipe, was produced in Oregon at the time.

But it was St. Benedict's aptly-named pastor, Father Owen Hope, OMI, who came to the rescue.

"Father Hope — bless his heart — drove down to Oregon to get some more sausage and bring it back in time for us to open on Sunday," Jan Barrett, the parish's pastoral assistant for administration, recalled this month. "It was at least a 400-mile round trip."

The first boxing match parishioner Joe Milanoski ever witnessed was in the basement of the old St. Benedict Church. Sponsored by the Holy Names Society and the Catholic Order of Foresters, the "smokers," as they were known, lived up to their name: the place "was full of cigar smoke," he recalled this month.

Milanoski graduated from St. Benedict School in 1929. He was there that day in the mid-1920s when the students were told to grab their coats and personal supplies and proceed from the old school on the second floor of the church building to the new state-of-the-art school still in use today.

Milanoski recalls that the new school had several rooms equipped for the first two years of high school, though that scenario never played out.

He remembers that the flooring in the new building was a dark, brown linoleum that was periodically cleaned with a light oil that made it slippery for a day or so. "Some of the kids were brave and would take a small leap off the steps and slide across the floor," he said.

A parishioner since 1944, Dorothy Schuler and her husband, John, who died 20 years ago, sent all 12 of their children through the parish school and came to regard St. Benedict's as "our second home."

"For the first two years we didn't know anybody," she said. "But once we got the kids in school it was like a big happy family. St. Benedict's was very involved with their families."

Schuler remembers the parish's bygone era when they had the luxury of having four or five priests on staff. "I think we sort of took (it) for granted," she said. "We had all the services possible."

Text by Terry McGuire, drawn from interviews and parish's centennial booklet.