Faith community has immigrant roots

A century ago it was the Catholic immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Germany and other parts of Europe who settled in rural Rainier Valley.

Today, many of the Catholic families that make up the now residential parish have roots in other parts of the world: the Philippines, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific.

Then, as now, St. Edward’s is a parish of immigrants. “Maybe we don’t have that much material resources,” said Father Felino Paulino, priest administrator, “but the faith of the people is vibrant.”

The parish will celebrate its centennial later this month with a dinner Oct. 14 and a Mass Oct. 15.

Its history

It was established in late 1906 after Florence O’Rourke and a small group of fellow Catholics petitioned Bishop Edward O’Dea for a parish. He named the new faith community in honor of Edward the Confessor (1002-1066), the English king and saint known for his generosity to the poor and to strangers.

Father Edward Lorigan, an aging but still energetic priest, was appointed founding pastor. He celebrated the first Mass on Christmas Day 1906 in Pratt’s Hall in Hillman City. Within months the new church was ready.

Father Lorigan, who died two years into his pastorate, was succeeded by his assistant, Father William Quigley, who built a second church in 1911 that was to serve as the parish church until the current church opened in 1958.

With major help from parishioner George Dana, Father Quigley also launched St. Edward School in 1911 — the first free parochial school in the state, according to the parish history. Staffed by the Tacoma Dominicans for the next seven decades, the school opened with an enrollment of 144 — the same number as in this 2006-2007 school year.

By 1953 the school was bulging with 678 students — more than 50 to a class.

From 1913-19 and again in 1923, St. Edward School included two high school grades. Tragedy struck the school community in April 1917 when Sister Mary Leila was terribly burned when hot wax she was preparing exploded. She died the next day.

In 1922, a new St. Edward School building was opened under Father John O’Hagan, pastor from late 1911 -24. His successor was Father Nicholas O’Rafferty, the parish’s

Parishioners gather in 1958 for the dedication of their new church. Seating 1,200 worshippers, it is one of the largest churches in the archdiocese and was the first Catholic church in the state to be consecrated in 1967 by Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly. The Moi-Sai stone mural above the entrance depicts the story of St. Edward giving his precious ring to a beggar because the saint had no money on his person at the time.
ST. EDWARD’S: Still welcoming newcomers ‘with a variety of accents’

Continued from page 1

longest-serving pastor and also the author of several religious books. Father O’Rafferty guided the community for 26 years, slowly leading the parish through the Depression and out of its $105,000 facilities debt. He led the community in a mortgage-burning party on Jan. 27, 1939.

For the next dozen years, the number of St. Edward households quadrupled as families moved to the area to work in the war effort. Father Michael O’Callaghan, whose 21-year pastorate saw the community roll up its sleeves and raise funds to build the current church and an addition to the school, among other improvements.

By the parish’s 75th anniversary celebration in 1981, St. Edward’s had produced a dozen priests and 18 women religious. But also by then the number of registered households had dropped to about 600 to 700, a little more than half of what it had been in the mid-1960s.

The present

St. Edward’s today numbers 1,200 households, hailing from low-and-middle-income Rainier Valley to the well-to-do neighborhoods overlooking Lake Washington. Some 40 percent of the households are of Filipino ancestry, making it the largest Filipino faith community in the archdiocese. Anglo make up another 20 percent, followed by Pacific Islanders, African Americans and Southeast Asians (each about 10 percent). English and Spanish-language Masses, along with readings in Tagalog, reflect the parish’s diversity. The parishioners — though from a variety of cultures — are serious and passionate about their faith, said Father Felino Paulino, priest administrator since 2005 and himself a native of the Philippines. He pointed to the colorful religious cultural celebrations held throughout the year, such as the Filipino community’s nine-day Christmastime novena, Sibang Gabi.

“At the same time… we are economically challenged,” Father Paulino said. “People make great sacrifices, working two and three jobs” to support their families. “But they still make sacrifices for the church…(which) is very encouraging for me to see as a priest.”

Currently, the parish is establishing a monthly family Mass, and it is seeking to promote the gift of stewardship.

Among other ministries, St. Edward’s has a strong St. Vincent de Paul Society, which sponsors a fundraising dinner-dance each spring. One year the dinner-dance raised $15,000 for the school, she recalled, quite an achievement, she said, especially since the tickets were only $15.

The 1950s and ‘60s saw an abundance of fundraisers at St. Edward’s as the parish acquired new land, constructed a new church, convent and school addition, and made other improvements to the parish campus. “We had fundraisers all the time,” recalled Lou DeFusco, who with his wife, Theresa, has been a parishioner since 1950. “And Father (Michael) O’Callaghan was the driving force.”

Mary and John L. O’Brien are among St. Edward’s longest-residing parishioners. Mr. O’Brien, who’ll be 95 next month, represented the district in the state legislature for more than half a century and is Speaker Emeritus of the House of Representatives. Not long ago, the couple donated the funds to renovate the parish gym and add a meeting room. It is called the O’Brien Center & St. Edward Plaza Room.

Mary O’Brien recalls the fundraising card parties held in the school auditorium when she was a girl. They were extremely popular events, she said last week. “We’d go around (as students at the parish school) and sell tickets for a quarter.”

Reed College of Education, 1991; Dr. Felino Paulino, 2005

Rev. Richard Parle, 1976
Rev. Gary Morelli, 1982
Rev. Gerald Stanley, 1986
Rev. Joseph Tyson, 1996
Rev. Felino Paulino, 2005

The entire student body gathers in front of their new school in 1923. By the 1950s classrooms were packed with 400 more students than the building was originally designed for.

Two-DAY CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

St. Edward Church, 4205 S. Orcas St.
Oct. 14, 6:30 p.m. Gala Dinner. Tickets, $50; reservations required. 722-7888.
Program will include recognition of priests, Dominican nuns and others with past ties to the parish.
Oct. 15, 9 a.m. Mass celebrated by Father Paulino. Reception follows.
11 a.m. centennial Mass celebrated by Bishop Tyson. Free brunch hosted by Tongan community follows.

ST. EDWARD PASTORS

Rev. Edward Lorigan, 1906
Rev. William Quigley, 1908
Rev. F. A. O’Hagan, 1911
Rev. Nicholas O’Rafferty, 1924
Rev. Joseph Dougherty, 1950
Rev. Michael O’Callaghan, 1951
Rev. D. Harvey McIntyre, 1973

Mary O’Brien recalls the fundraising card parties held in the school auditorium when she was a girl. They were extremely popular events, she said last week. “We’d go around (as students at the parish school) and sell tickets for a quarter.”