

PARISH PROFILE

'It's a good parish getting better'

Olympic Peninsula faith community strives for holiness amid its many ministries

PORT ANGELES
BY TERRY MCGUIRE

Something's afoot spiritually at Queen of Angels Parish.

The weekday Masses are drawing well, from 20 to 70 people each day. So are the confessions, held 30 minutes prior to Mass every day of the week, Sundays included.

Also well attended are the Tuesday night catechetical classes taught by Pastor Father Thomas Nathe. And parishioners are taking their devotional practices seriously, Father Nathe notes, as witnessed by the numbers who gather for the rosary prior to each

Mass, or who commit to the 23 hours of eucharistic adoration, which runs from the end of the Friday morning Mass to the start of the Saturday morning liturgy.



Father Thomas Nathe

"I think it's holier than your typical parish," Father Nathe says

of his community of 819 households. "I know that might sound absolutely blasphemous, but I sincerely believe it to be true."

In addition to all of the above, he points to the hundreds of parishioners who have been praying for specific causes — from the "adopt a baby" effort in which people commit to praying for an unborn child each day for nine months, to last year's Year for Priests spiritual adoption program through which 329 parishioners from Queen of Angels and neighboring St. Joseph



Built in 1951 near the end of the 24-year pastorate of Benedictine Father Bernard Neary, the Romanesque-style Queen of Angels Church is the parish's fourth church building. The belfry holds the bell from the first church. It continues to call the community to services today, with volunteers ringing it the old-fashioned way by pulling the rope.

Parish in Sequim prayed daily for a priest in the archdiocese whose name they were given at random.

Father Nathe, nearing his fourth year of his first pastorate, isn't the only one sensing an increased spirituality at Queen of Angels. Dan Gase, who with his wife, Cynthia, is a longtime parishioner, sees it as well.

"My take on it is that over the last few years so many of the parishioners seem to be taking a desire for holiness to a whole new level, another rung up on the ladder," said Gase, a member of the parish finance council who also sings in the choir and plays piano at the 11 a.m. Sunday Mass, among other ministries.

Whether the upswing is due to world events, the challenges of the sluggish economy, an increased maturity among some parishioners or "just people going through a spiritual growth," Gase is impressed with his fellow parishioners.

"I think they're really striving for a closer relationship with God," he says.

Father Nathe summarizes his community succinctly: "It's a good parish getting better."

Parishioner outreach

Not that Queen of Angels isn't involved outside the spiritual realm. In the past decade alone parishioners have stepped up to serve the wider community.

They include Reath Ellefson, a cancer survivor who started the annual free community Thanksgiving dinner at the church in 2008. The meal drew some 300 diners last year.

"I get so much pleasure out of cooking anyway, and I just love to cook for big crowds," Ellefson explained last week, "and in talking to different people in the community and seeing the need for this, I went to Father [Nathe] and asked, and he thought it was great."

The dinner draws volunteers both from the parish and the broader community.

"I like our sense of community," she said of Queen of Angels. "I like how everybody pulls together."

Parishioners Dr. Ed and Phyllis Hopfner opened a free clinic in 2001 for those unable to afford medical care.

Queen of Angels Parish, Port Angeles

Mission: 1891
Parish: 1904
Households: 819
Address: 209 W. 11th St.
Phone: 360-452-2351
Website:
www.queenofangelsparish.org

Pastors:

Father Oswald Baran, O.S.B., 1904
Father Wolfgang Steinkogler, O.S.B., 1904
Father Albert Erkens, O.S.B., 1911
Father Benedict Schweizer, O.S.B., 1924
Father Demetrius Jeuneman, O.S.B., 1925
Father Bernard Neary, O.S.B., 1928
Father Andrew McHugh, O.S.B., 1952
Father Anselm Lenzlinger, O.S.B., 1954
Father Alcuin Lawrence, O.S.B., 1960
Father William Maat, O.S.B., 1968
Father Luke O'Donnell, O.S.B., 1973
Father Urban Feucht, O.S.B., 1980
Father Alan Marshall, 1981
Father Jim Williams, 1989
Father Martin Bourke, 1992
Father John Wilkie, 1995
Father David Brandt, 1998
Father Kurt Nagel, 2000
Father Thomas Nathe, 2007

By 2005, when they turned the operation over to another organization, they were serving from 300 to 400 patients per month.

Each January, Queen of Angels parishioners load a chartered bus to participate in the Washington State March for Life at the state Capitol in Olympia. Until last year, the parish's St. Vincent de Paul Society conference operated a thrift store in Port Angeles. The conference continues with a food bank and other services.

In all, the parish has more than 66 ministries, says pastoral administrator Cyndi Rypl. She marvels at the involvement of parishioners, such as those who help her out in the office, the 145 to 150 who volunteered for the 23-hour adoration, and the grandparents and others who assist at the parish school.

She said visiting priests have remarked how Father Nathe is fortunate to have such a holy parish. But a parish is "often as holy as their pastor strives for them" to be, Rypl said. "We're really blessed to have Father Nathe here."

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The old church as it looked in 1925.



A 1948 postcard shows the parish school bus.

PARISH PROFILE: School attracts students from far away

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Queen of Angels has become an anchor on the north Olympic Peninsula over the past century. Its parishioners have served as city, community and business leaders. Its parish school, opened in 1927, has educated generations of families.

"When one says 'Queen of Angels' on the north Olympic Peninsula, others know where that is, and that there's a great community of people," says parishioner Cathy Wiswell, chair of both the pastoral council and stewardship committee.

Parish school among the strengths

The parish considers its school one of its enduring strengths. Originally staffed by the Sisters of St. Ann from Victoria, British Columbia, and later by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Peace of Newark, it draws from Port Townsend and other distant parts of the peninsula. One family drives from Port Hadlock, more than an hour away.

"We have some really committed families," says Principal Mike Juhas.

With 113 students in kindergarten through eighth grade and another



This 1895 photo shows the Queen of Angels confirmation class on a picnic with Seattle Bishop Aegidius Junger, at right in back.

33 in preschool, the school is striving to hold its own amid a general Port Angeles population that has seen the number of school-age children drop an

average of 100 students per year over the past 20 years, Father Nathe said.

Juhas, in the first year of his first principalship, says they're actively

marketing the school in the surrounding parishes and communities. They also joined the local Chamber of Commerce and plan to expand the preschool hours next year and add an after-school enrichment program.

"I think it's one of the best Catholic schools in the archdiocese," Father Nathe says. "What I mean by 'Catholic' is catechesis and Catholic identity and culture in the school."

All but one of the teachers is Catholic, and 84 percent of the student body is Catholic.

Benedictine history

A predominantly Anglo parish of European ancestry today, the Queen of Angels community started as Holy Angels mission in 1891. It was established as Queen of Angels Parish in 1904, with Benedictine priests serving until 1980, according to a parish history.

Looking ahead, Father Nathe said the Queen of Angels community is considering establishing a chapel for perpetual adoration. They also are waiting for the "green light" from Archbishop J. Peter Sartain to start a sister parish-type relationship with a mountain village in Peru.