

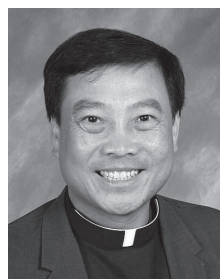
PARISH PROFILE

Parish with Slavic roots enters its second century

St. Joseph's and its 'quaint little church' steeped in history

TACOMA
BY TERRY MCGUIRE

The spring of 1911 saw a beehive of activity at South 34th Street and Tacoma Avenue South. After working their shifts in the local factories and mills, the city's Slovak community spent the evenings digging the basement and



Father Tuan Nguyen

laying the foundation for their new brick church.

"It was not just one or two members of the congregation, but all the Slovaks, young and old, who helped in beginning and in constructing St. Joseph's Slovak Catholic Church," according to a 1986 parish history.

A hundred springs later, although St. Joseph's remains predominantly Caucasian, only about a third of its 150 households are of Slavic ancestry, estimates parishioner Margaret Hofer, co-author of a new centennial book on the parish. She said maybe 10 or so current parish members trace their roots to the founding families.

"There's really not very many of us left," said Hofer, who was baptized there 67 years ago, and whose Czechoslovakian grandfather helped build the parish.

It's been decades since the liturgies were celebrated in Slavic, but a sense of the parish's ethnic heritage lives on in the Slavic foods served on special occasions, and most notably in that 400-seat church building still in use a century later.

"It is the most quaint little church inside — it's absolutely beautiful," said Hofer, noting that its furnishings and sacred vessels — such as the tabernacle contributed by one of the women's circles back in 1937 — are a reminder of the parish's Slavic history.

The church has been featured on city tours of historic buildings, said current pastor Father Tuan Nguyen, who heads St. Joseph's and five other Tacoma parishes.

Small but active community

Although St. Joseph's is the smallest of the city's 13 parishes, it's a "very active community," Father Nguyen said. It's a parish that supports local charities for people who are hungry, homeless or abused. And its Veterans Day dinners, spring and fall rummage sales and St. Patrick's Day breakfasts are popular events.

"We're always doing something," said Emily Scheive, a lifelong parishioner whose parents settled in the parish in the 1920s. She and her husband, Ray, chair of the parish finance committee, were married at St. Joseph's in 1957. "It's a small parish, but we do pretty good," she said as she listed the various charitable efforts the parish is involved in.

Bolstered by a sizeable savings account made possible by the generosity of past parishioners, the parish has been a big supporter of nearby Holy Rosary School, which parish children attend, said St. Joseph's Parish Council President Laurie Halte. St. Joseph's also provides financial aid to struggling parishes in their six-parish cluster, parishioners say.

It's a "very family-oriented" community that is "very proud" of its Slavic roots, Father Nguyen said. He can relate to that.

"I come from the Vietnamese culture, and many Vietnamese like to have their own church and celebrate their heritage," he said. The same goes for St. Joseph's, a one-time national parish which still draws Slavic Catholics from "all over" the region, he said.

Slavic-speaking priests

According to a parish history, the Slavs — made up of Russians, Poles, Bulgarians, Serbs, Croats, Czechs, Slo-



Except for the addition of a ramp and other minor changes, St. Joseph Church looks the same as it did 100 years ago. Its walls were made of "12-inch solid brick," longtime pastor Father Joseph Hayostek once boasted to the Tacoma News Tribune. Today the once all-Slavic parish welcomes all kinds of different nationalities, said Margaret Hofer, a member of the history committee.

vaks and Slovenes — began immigrating to the U.S. from Europe on a large scale around 1870, with more than 50 families residing in Tacoma in 1899. In 1908 they petitioned Seattle Bishop Edward O'Dea to establish a Slovak parish in Tacoma. He dedicated their church, which cost the community \$15,000, on May 19, 1912.

Parishioners were stalwart in scouring the nation to find a Slavic-speaking priest willing to come west to Tacoma. In a 1929 letter to Bishop O'Dea, for example, a committee of parishioners urged him to reconsider his rejection of a Slavic-speaking priest they had sought.

"The old members of this parish ... have waited 18 years for a priest to whom they could converse with the satisfied feeling that they understand him and are being understood," the committee wrote.

St. Joseph's fourth pastor, Minnesota-born Father Joseph Hayostek, came and served for 39 years, up to his death in 1969. His successor, Father Michael Lukas, was the parish's last Slovakian-speaking priest. Father Victor Cloquet, who followed him as pastor in 1983, was the last resident priest.

Father Cloquet was baptized at St. Joseph's because of his family's Slavic ties on his mother's side. His maternal grandmother was from what is now the Czech Republic and attended St. Joseph's, but Father Cloquet said he didn't speak Czech, which is similar to Slovakian.

Now 85 and among the priests who will concelebrate the centennial Mass on May 15 with retired Seattle Archbishop Alex J. Brunett, Father Cloquet said he plans to be buried from St. Joseph's.

He has fond memories of his eight years as its pastor, including the 75th anniversary celebration in 1986 when he accompanied about 26 parishioners on a pilgrimage to Slovakia; and the 1984 trip with several busloads of parishioners to Vancouver, British Columbia, to be part of the visit by Pope John

St. Joseph Parish, Tacoma

Founded: 1911 (Slovak)
Households: 150
Street address: 608 S. 34th St.
Phone: 253-472-2489

PASTORS:

- Father Aloysius Milnar, 1911
- Father Z. Rozanski, 1913
- Father Andrew Lavicka, 1920
- Father Paul Kucera, O.S.B., 1928
- Father Joseph Hayostek, 1930
- Father Michael Lukas, 1970
- Father Victor Cloquet, 1983
- Father Richard Cebula, O.S.B., 1992 (administrator)
- Father John Wilkie, 1998
- Father Tuan Nguyen, 2009

Paul II, a fellow Slav.

Younger families sought

And while the Slavic presence today is only a fraction of what it was, parishioners intend to preserve its heritage by taking good care of the church. The building was damaged in the 2001 Nisqually quake and underwent a seismic retrofit the same year. More recently, its interior has been repainted, the Stations of the Cross have been restored to their original state, and restrooms have been upgraded.

"We've realized that we are its caregivers and not its owners," said Halte, a parishioner of 14 years. "We aren't the ones that dug the basement. We aren't the ones that built it ... We want to make sure that it stays well maintained and that it's there for future generations."

The future generations are of present concern to parishioners such as Halte, Hofer and Emily Scheive. Some remember the parish's heyday when CYO teams flourished at St. Joseph's. Now the teams are gone, and the three women hope the graying parish will be able to attract young families to ensure a second century. Back in the 1990s, when the parish was paired with neighboring Holy Rosary, there were even fears that St. Joseph's might close.

Parishioners, no matter their ethnic background, have a real attachment to the parish, said Halte, who is of Irish descent. "We feel like it's another family," she said.

They're hoping the centennial celebration will help further put St. Joseph's on the map and attract more families. They're off to a good start.

The parish held its first Slovak Dinner March 20, and it was well attended, with patrons feasting on traditional foods such as Holubky (cabbage rolls) and Makovnik (poppy seed rolls). Hofer said there's talk of making it an annual event.



Parishioners join Seattle Archbishop Thomas A. Connolly in celebrating St. Joseph's 50th anniversary in 1961.

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION SUNDAY, MAY 15

9:30 a.m. Musical program featuring Slovak folk music.

11 a.m. Mass with retired Seattle Archbishop Alex J. Brunett presiding, to be concelebrated by past St. Joseph priests and local clergy; followed by historical display in the parish hall, where participants can pre-order a copy of the new centennial book for \$20.

2 p.m. Social hour, followed by dinner at 3 p.m., at the La Quinta Inn, 1425 E. 27th St., Tacoma. Tickets are \$25 for adults, \$10 for children, and reservations are required.

For more information, contact the parish office at 253-472-2489.