

PARISH PROFILE

# 'Family-friendly' Federal Way parish celebrates 50 years

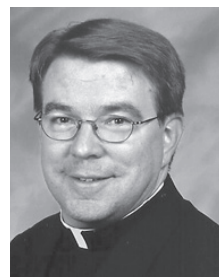
At St. Vincent de Paul Parish, there's always something going on

BY KEVIN BIRNBAUM

St. Vincent de Paul Parish kicked off its celebration of the parish's 50th anniversary on Sept. 10 with its annual Fall Festival, featuring live music, carnival games, raffles, a barbecue and beer garden, cuisine from Mexico, Polynesia and Nigeria, a pie-eating contest and even a "text off," in which high schoolers raced to type out the Eight Beatitudes on their cell phones. The day also included a multicultural Mass.

All pretty fitting for a community that Pastor Father William McKee describes as "big," "active" and "diverse." The Fall Festival also fits with St. Vincent's reputation as a particularly "family-friendly" parish; it was created to serve

as an affordable alternative "for families for whom it was too expensive to go to ... the county or state fairs," said Father McKee.



Father William McKee

The parish's 50th anniversary celebration will continue with a special all-parish Mass with Archbishop J. Peter Sartain on Saturday, Sept. 24 at 5 p.m. in the Decatur High School gym.

## Growing diversity

The parish looks quite different than when it began in 1961 with about 300 mostly white families. The community has grown to more than 2,400 households, probably half of which are non-Anglo, said Deacon Del Hoover, including people of Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, African and other descent. Much of the parish's ethnic diversification has occurred in the last 10 to 15 years, said Deacon Hoover.

One thing that has remained constant through the years is that St. Vincent's is a busy place.

"There's always something going on here," said Father McKee, who's been pastor since 2008. "Often I come into the parking lot and see all the cars and try to figure out what's going on tonight."

The parish has a large Knights of Columbus council, an active St. Vincent de Paul Society group, Legion of Mary and a Layette Committee that makes hand-knitted or crocheted blankets, sweater sets and booties for newborn babies in need.

Parish volunteers also serve supper to the homeless and those in need each Saturday at The Church of the Good Shepherd, a local Episcopal church.



St. Vincent de Paul Parish's current church building was completed in 1996.

"It's a very vibrant community," said Virginia Wetli, a parishioner since 1970 who served as principal of the parish school from 1983 to 1995. "Lots of things going on for a lot of different people with different interests."

## Family ministry focus

St. Vincent's has had an active family ministry office since 1979.

"I think that's what has made St. Vincent's really unique, is that it attempts to be a very family-friendly parish and provide something for everyone," said Robin LaMoria, who retired last year after 30 years as the parish's family minister.

The parish offers professional counseling, a bereavement support group, a Divorce & Beyond program, a Transition Network for those looking for work, a Mothers & Others peer support group, and a peer support ministry for seniors called Vincentians.

Each January, 50 parish couples are invited to go on a Marriage Renewal retreat, which is a boon for their relationships and for the parish, said LaMoria.

"As they go through the process of that weekend, they get to know the other 49 couples really well, but they also find their way into the parish, and at the end of the weekend they not only enriched their marriages but they're committed to enriching the parish also and getting involved in parish life, so it's a very unique and wonderful program."

The parish also puts 10 percent of its ordinary income into a "tithing fund," which is available to families in case of emergency or hardship.

## Youth on a 'Journey'

Young people play a big role in St. Vincent's parish community. The "very good" parish school has about 280 students from kindergarten through eighth grade, said Father McKee, and the parish's faith formation program, called Grapevine, has 200 youths from first through fifth grade.

About 50 high school and 30 middle school students participate in the parish's Life Teen and Edge youth ministry programs, respectively. They meet each Sunday night after the weekly Life Teen Mass.

This summer, the parish sponsored three youth mission trips: Middle school students went to the Skagit Valley, while the high school students split up and went to Yakima and Tijuana, where they helped build houses with Esperanza International.

The highlight of the year for high schoolers is a retreat held each April called Journey, which was created by St. Vincent's pastor emeritus, Father Thomas Vandenberg.

"This was a dream of his — like, literally he couldn't sleep one night and he came up with this retreat model," said Brita Gilbertson, the pastoral assistant for youth ministry. Each year, several Journey alums come back to help with the retreat, which involves a lot of surprises.

"Our slogan is 'Be a friend, make a friend, bring a friend to Christ,'" said Gilbertson.

The parish also has a very active Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults program. "Last year we had, I think, 30 baptisms at the Easter Vigil," said Father McKee.

## St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Federal Way

Founded: 1961

Households: 2,420

Street Address: 30525 Eighth Ave. S., Federal Way, WA 98003

Phone: 253-839-2320

Website: [www.stvincentparish.org](http://www.stvincentparish.org)

## PASTORS:

Father Lawrence Willenborg, 1961

Father Harold Quigg, 1972

Father Patrick Callahan, 1981

Father Thomas Vandenberg, 1983

Father William McKee, 2008

## Parish history

St. Vincent de Paul Parish was established by Archbishop Thomas Connolly on Nov. 24, 1961. Father Lawrence Willenborg, who had worked at the chancery as an assistant to the archbishop, was appointed pastor.

Initially, the parish's building plans included a church, a hall and a CCD center. But when the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur volunteered to staff a parish school, the project was expanded to include a school and a convent.

When the parish plant was dedicated in 1965, Father Willenborg noted, "All this has taken place in just over three years, and certainly such speedy advance must be a sign of God's blessing and the guidance of our holy patron, St. Vincent de Paul."

The charter of the first parish council, started in 1970, reflected "an openness, characteristic of the freshening breeze of ecumenism, that allowed membership to include persons who may not be of the Catholic faith," according to a parish history.

Shortly before Father Willenborg's death in 1972, Father Harold Quigg was named pastor of the parish. He significantly expanded the roles of lay ministers in the parish.

Father Thomas Vandenberg's 25-year pastorate began in 1983. In response to a parish survey calling for enhanced youth ministry, he converted the rectory to a youth center and preschool. Through much of his time at the parish, he "worked hard to get the early vision of St. Vincent's completed," said the parish history.

The parish's "Fulfilling Our Vision" campaign started in 1990, and ground was broken for a new church on Mother's Day 1995. The St. Vincent's community began worshiping in its new church in September of 1996. In 2003, the parish dedicated an addition to the school, a gymnasium and an expansion of the parish hall.

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ROBIN LAMORIA