

PARISH PROFILE

Welcoming Arlington faith community is 'a parish for others'

Relationship with church in Kenya is at heart of outreach

BY KEVIN BIRNBAUM

Most Catholic parishes like to think of themselves as welcoming, but Immaculate Conception Parish takes it to another level. The parish mission statement reads, in part: "We proclaim our mission through our faithfulness to the Gospel through acts of Worship, Education, Love, Community, Outreach, Ministry, Ecumenism & inclusion, and Stewardship."



Father James Dalton

"And that spells 'WELCOMES,'" notes pastor Father James Dalton, who's been at the parish since 2005.

When pastoral council president Bill Higgins was looking for a parish in the late 1990s, he visited several before he found Immaculate Conception.

"We were welcomed immediately ... and I knew immediately that that's where I wanted to be," he said. "Virtually from the minute you walk in the door you just feel this sense of belonging. People go out of their way to make you feel a part of whatever's going on."

Gail Thompson, who's been a parishioner since the 1960s and the parish secretary for the last 26 years, said God gave the parish "the gift of hospitality."

"It's a warm parish," she added. "We have a wonderful spirituality, but yet a great humor about it."

The parish community is "a tight-knit family," said Higgins. Thompson concurred: "When someone is hurting, we all hurt."

'A parish for others'

But while it's tight-knit, it is not just an inward-focused family. Immaculate Conception is decidedly "a parish for others," said Father Dalton. "Outreach is just a big part of what happens here."

That's most clear in the community's "sister parish" relationship with Christ the King Cathedral and Father Christopher Wanyonyi in Bungoma, Kenya. The connection began about five years ago when Immaculate Conception raised money to drill two wells in Bungoma, "and then we formed this sister parish relationship, and it's just snowballed," said Father Dalton.

Now the parish raises money to sponsor Kenyan students' education. Last year they helped about 60 students with their school fees. Parishioners also support the small businesses of women in Bungoma.

Closer to home, Immaculate Con-

Immaculate Conception Parish, Arlington

Founded: 1890 (mission)
1916 (parish)

Households: 442

Street Address: 1200 E. Fifth St.
Arlington, WA 98223-1119

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 69
Arlington, WA 98223-0069

Phone: 360-435-8565

Web Site: www.icp-sjvm.org

ception's St. Vincent de Paul Society is "wonderful and very active," said Father Dalton.

For the last three years, the parish has cooperated with three other Arlington churches to provide overnight shelter for the homeless during the winter. Immaculate Conception opens its doors on Sunday and Monday nights when the temperature dips below 32 degrees, and provides dinner and breakfast for the guests.

Parishioners also collaborate with other churches to form a "brown bag brigade" that makes sack lunches each week to be given out at the local food bank.

'Sacred forest'

Immaculate Conception, which is home to 442 families, has about 50 ministries, said Father Dalton. "For a small parish, it's quite amazing to me."

They include a "very helpful" Knights of Columbus chapter, a "very active" Women's Group, and a men's group started about five years ago by former pastoral council president Jay Wilson called Ordinary Men in Ordinary Time. Members meet on Saturday mornings before the start of Advent and Lent to pray the rosary, share breakfast and discuss spiritual topics. About 20 men are involved, said Wilson, and often 12 will turn out on a given week, an interesting coincidence with the number of Jesus' apostles.

The faith formation programs for elementary and high school students are "wonderful," said Father Dalton. "This is one of the few parishes I've been in where we don't have to beg people to be catechists; we always seem to have enough."

"Virtually from the minute you walk in the door you just feel this sense of belonging."

PASTORAL COUNCIL PRESIDENT
BILL HIGGINS

In front of the church, there is a stand of trees known as the "sacred forest."

About three years ago, the youth of the parish created a "rosary walk" winding through it.

"It's almost like a labyrinth," said Father Dalton, "and so in the summertime we have prayer and picnic on Wednesday nights ... We come and pray the rosary and then have a potluck picnic."

The sacred forest is also a popular



Immaculate Conception Parish's current, 400-seat church was completed in 1983.

place for residents of a nearby senior housing center to visit, he said, "so it's nice for the neighborhood as well."

Annual parish events include a dinner dance fundraiser each spring, a fall bazaar, a February chili cook-off, and a parish picnic.

Historic bell stolen

Immaculate Conception got its start in 1890 as a mission of St. Michael Parish in Snohomish. Masses were celebrated monthly in the homes of members, including the McCue and Callahan families, until 1894, when they moved to the old Garfield School. A church building was constructed in 1897 and moved in 1906.

In 1916, Immaculate Conception became a parish and Father William G. Fitzgerald was named its first pastor. In 1919, a new 300-seat church was completed at a cost of \$6,000 and dedicated on May 1.

During the 1950s, plans for a new church building were drawn up under Father James Deady but ultimately shelved.

In 1981, pastor Father Oliver Duggan launched another building fund drive. A new 400-seat church, which cost \$505,000, was completed in 1983 and dedicated by Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen on June 12 of that year.

This past May, a 1,000-pound brass bell was stolen from in front of the church. The bell, which was rung before Sunday Masses, was believed to have been part of the parish since 1919.

PASTORS:

Father P. Van Holderbeke, 1894

Father John O'Brien, 1900

Father A.T. Bourke, 1903

Father T.F. Van de Walle, 1907

Father William G. Fitzgerald, 1916

Father John D. McGrath, 1925

Father Francis Jones, 1933

*Father C. Sloane, 1936

*Father Edmond Hayes, 1937

Father Roger Furlong, 1937

Father Edwin Budde, S.J., 1947

*Father William J. Ogden, 1948

Father James Deady, 1952

Father Edward Boye, 1958

Father Earl LaBerge, 1965

Father William Slate, 1969

Father Bernard Jonientz, 1974

Father Oliver Duggan, 1980

Father Lawrence Low, 1985

Father Michael Angelovic, 1986

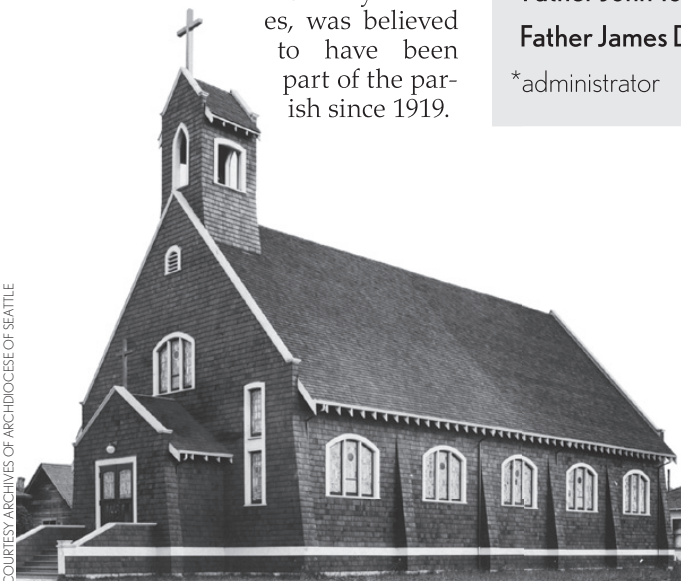
Father Gary Wiesenberger, 1990

Father Richard Spicer, 1991

*Father John Topel, S.J., 2003

Father James Dalton, 2005

*administrator



A 300-seat church was completed in 1919 at a cost of \$6,000.