

People

St. John's Church still 'down home friendly' after 35 years

By Jim Fruitt

To find the heart of St. John's Catholic Church is to look back at the hard times. The times when people can either fragment into bickering bits or turn to each other for help.

"When the chips are down these people really come together," said Fr. John Kennedy, pastor of St. John's for 11 years. Kennedy remembers times like the '82 flood and the havoc it played on the members of his congregation.

"There was one woman out here cooking after her house had just slid down the hill," he said, with his Irish accent. "She's out here cooking for people instead of trying to get her property out. That really takes something inside."

St. John's is one of the smaller churches in Felton, 350 families. The church is getting a face lift this week after the Oct. 17 earthquake toppled over its brick facade. A new wooden steeple is being built for about \$6,000 and a redwood cross will be placed there. Work on the church is expected to end next week.

The structure is designed more like a home than a church and parish members say they like it that way. They say the parish has a rare, down-home friendliness.

The congregation is growing steadily with a influx of young people and their children, Kennedy said. He gathered the history of the parish which goes back to the late 1940's.

Until 1947 the Felton area was part of Holy Cross parish in Santa Cruz. It was there that the children received religious instruction either in Holy Cross School or in their catechetical program.

The first priest to say Mass in Felton was Fr. P.D. Hassett, a retired priest of the Diocese of Monterey/Fresno. From his retirement in 1929 until his death in 1938, he lived in a house on San Lorenzo Ave. near Highway 9. He used a room in his home as a

chapel where he said Mass daily at 7 a.m. Some Catholics in the area attended his Mass as did the boys from Captain Ed's Boyland summer camp.

When Fr. Hassett died, the bishop gave permission for Sunday Mass to be said on the campgrounds during the summer months. A Jesuit Priest came from Alma College to say the Mass from 1938 to 1947. During those years Felton Catholics asked for a priest from Holy Cross to say Mass in Felton, but nothing happened.

In 1947 Fr. John Nelson was appointed pastor of St. Vincent de Paul parish in Davenport and the boundaries of the parish were extended to include Felton.

Felton became a mission of Davenport and would have Mass every Sunday throughout the year. For the next six years Sunday Mass was said in Felton Community Hall.

In 1952 Fr. Nelson died and Fr. William Lane took over as pastor for Davenport and Felton. Fr. Lane lived in Felton and continued to say Sunday Mass at the Community Hall, and daily Mass in the Crown Restaurant, a building owned by Mr. and Mrs. Louis Costella.

By 1951 the Catholics in the area had formed what was called the "Felton Catholic Church Building Committee." The following are excerpts from the minutes of a meeting on April 5, 1951: "A special meeting of the Felton Catholic Church Building Committee was called to order by the president, Wm. Sinnott, in the office of Gray and Sinnott. Those present were: Father John Nelson, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Sinnott, Mr. and Mrs. James DeLisle, Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Slakey, Mrs. Geo Martin, Mrs. Ted Rolff, Dolly Sinnott, Ann Escobar, Ed Costella, Mrs. Talbot.

"The President announced that the first purpose of the meeting was to discuss the holding of a dinner to raise funds. Mr. Ed Costella offered the use of the dining room at



Construction of St. John's Catholic Church began in September of 1951.



St. John's Altar Society, circa 1952, left to right: Frances Peterson, Ardetta Schwartz, Dina Sinnott, Regina Costella, Josephine Oblak, and Winnifred Rolff.

Costella's Chalet."

This was to be the first of many fund-raising dinners for the St. John's. Later in the meeting, the group agreed to form a Felton Catholic Womens Guild. The Guild would hold regular monthly food

sales, the first being at the Crown Restaurant.

By 1951 the annual parish barbecue at Captain Ed Dougherty's Boyland Campgrounds had been going for four years, and this was supplemented by the steak dinner at

Costella's Chalet and the monthly food sales.

On August 14, 1951 the land for the church and rectory was purchased for \$7,000 and by March of 1952 the cash on hand amounted to \$8,300. The Catholic Extension Society donated \$5,000 and construction began in September of that year.

The following is an excerpt from a letter sent to the part-time parishioners who came to Felton for the summer: "After five years of downright hard work by the few permanent parishioners in Felton (about 38 families in all), and the generous help of our summer and weekend parishioners, this start has been made possible."

"All the money which has been raised thus far has been via the second collection, the annual barbecue, and the dinners and the food sales route..."

By February 2, 1953 more money was needed to complete construction and \$23,000 was borrowed from St. Patrick's Church in Watsonville. The church and rectory cost \$50,000 over and above the donated materials and the volunteer labor.

On April 5, 1953, Easter Sunday, the first Mass was held in St. John's new church, and on February 7, 1954 it was dedicated by Bishop A.J. Willinger. By the following year the parish was out of debt, which was a tribute to the whole community, Catholic and non-Catholic, who supported the fund raising events over the years.

On April 19, 1954 St. Vincent De Paul's Parish in Davenport was separated from St. John's and the Felton parish was expanded to take of the Scotts Valley area.

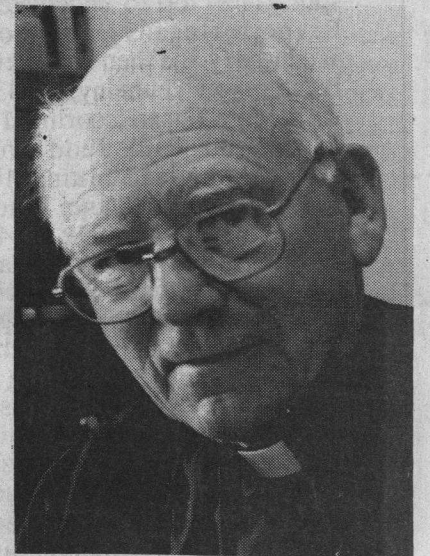
In 1955 Fr. Edward Haskins of Pacific Grove was appointed pastor and he would serve St. John's until 1963.

This was a time when there was a notable increase in the number of permanent and part-time parishioners. Holy Family sisters helped the parents with instruction

appointed pastor August 21, 1963 and immediately started the custom of having the rosary said before Mass. Soon thereafter he began having the Novena to Our Mother of Perpetual Help. Both devotions are still going strong.

By 1969 it was obvious that more room was necessary for religious education and special activities at St. John's. A new addition cost a total of \$181,484. There was \$134,000 saved up for the project and a \$48,000 loan was paid off in 1974.

On March 24, 1979 Fr. Patrick F. McHugh died and on May 1st Monsignor John Kennedy was appointed pastor of St. John's.



Monsignor Kennedy was born in Slago, Ireland in 1926. He was ordained June, 18 1950 and a few days later left Ireland for United States. Kennedy has so far spent his career in Monterey/Fresno Diocese. This June will be his 40th anniversary as a priest.

Births

HAFLEY: A son was born to Mr. and Mrs. Gary Alan Hafley (Janet Ann Caldera) of Felton on Jan. 4. The baby weighed 7 lbs. 7 oz.

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of the children and their preparation for the sacraments. St. John's Newman Club for high school students was organized.

Poor health made it impossible for Fr. Haskins to continue as pastor of St. John's and he resigned in August 1963.

Fr. Patrick McHugh was

and was named James Wesley.

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