

Saint Pat's is back

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Mike McCollum

Bishop Sylvester Ryan, flanked by Rev. Peter Cravello and a jubilant Rev. Mike Miller, lead parishioners up the steps to St. Patrick's Church. At right, Miller ceremoniously unlocks door to sanctuary.

Churches First mass celebrated in rebuilt church

By EMILIO ALVARADO
STAFF WRITER

The powerful 1989 earthquake may have destroyed the building that housed St. Patrick's Church, but it was not strong enough to kill the church's spirit.

That spirit was exhibited once again this morning as the church opened its doors for mass for the first time since the devastating 7.1 quake crumbled part of its walls and demolished its altar. Hundreds of worshipers attended the special mass this morning to commemorate the church's opening. Several worshipers were overcome with emotion as they entered the church.

A procession to St. Patrick's began around 9:30 a.m. at the parish hall on Brennan Street. Several hundred people filled the streets on their way to the church; a mariachi band played as the crowd sang, in both Spanish and English, "With joy we enter the house of the Lord."

"This is the day we see the fulfillment of hope," said Bishop Sylvester D. Ryan of the Monterey Diocese, who conducted this morning's mass.

Bishop Ryan joined the procession and at St. Patrick's received the key to the church from the building contractor. He then handed the key to the Rev. Mike Miller, the church's pastor.

The crowd cheered as the Rev. Miller held the key up in the air. He then opened the doors to the new St. Patrick's and the crowd streamed in, completely filling the church. A few dozen people spilled out through the doors.

The rebuilding of the church has taken the effort of many people and years of hard work. But it was all worth it, many said this morning.

"This is what happens when people work together," said Watsonville City Councilman Oscar Rios.

Another former Watsonville City Councilman, Paul Millidan, also attended the opening.

"It's nice to get back into the
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church again," said Millidan, who said he been an altar boy at the church many years ago.

The church was designed by Watsonville architect William Weeks and built in 1903. With its huge stained-glass windows and prominent steeple, the red brick church was perhaps Watsonville's most magnificent landmark. The 1989 earthquake, however, damaged the church so heavily that it would have cost more to repair than to rebuild.

The new church's exterior is almost exactly like the old church. It also retains the original stained-glass windows and the steeple. The interior of the church, however, has been renovated: the baptismal font is larger and the altar has been moved closer to the congregation.

Shortly after the earthquake, a massive funding campaign was launched and stretched across the United States. News of the church's devastation captured national and international attention. Reconstruction began in March 1993.

Nearly \$3 million was raised for the rebuilding project, but church officials said another \$981,000 is still needed. Some furnishings, including a new altar, will not be installed until Oct. 17, the fifth anniversary of the 1989 earthquake, which struck at 5:04 p.m. On that date, formal dedication services will be held.

Another mass was scheduled for today at 2 p.m. That mass was to be attended by students and staff from Notre Dame School. A special bilingual mass will be conducted tonight at 7:30.