

Kurt Ellison

Wedding party spills out to the front steps after the marriage of Leticia and Miguel Fuentes at the new St. Patrick's Church. The church is busy with regular services and up to three weddings each Saturday.

More than a building

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Churches - 1990

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St. Patrick's symbol of loss and recovery

On Oct. 17, five years ago, the earth shook for 15 seconds and changed Watsonville and Santa Cruz County forever. The disaster produced stories of horror, irony, heroism and humor. Everyone who stood in bewilderment an awe as their world heaved brings away indelible memories of that fraction of a minute. Today and Monday, the fifth anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake, Register Pajaronian photographers, editors and reporters recall 15 seconds, Oct. 17, 1989. — Editor

By J. ALEX TARQUINIO
STAFF WRITER

WHEN THE Loma Prieta earthquake hit five years ago, stones from high atop St. Patrick's Church crashed to the ground and statues of saints toppled into one another.

But the worst was yet to come. The church, which was built in 1903, was razed.

■ More photos and stories on the quake, pages 11-13

Today Watsonville residents, whether Catholic or not, are pleased the exterior of the new church looks so much like the old one. It also contains many artifacts from the old church, including the impressive stained glass windows and stations of the cross.

But the church's interior was constructed according to post-Vatican II architectural guidelines, which convey a whole different attitude toward worship, according to St. Patrick's pastor, the Rev. Michael Miller.

Many parishioners grumble about the new baptismal font, calling it a "Jacuzzi." They aren't too pleased with the modern appearance of the altar either, which is practically in the

middle of the church. The tabernacle screened off at the back also promotes some caustic remarks.

"Most of the parishioners, if they could have, would have built an exact copy of the old church," said Miller. "But we couldn't do that."

He points to a book produced by the 1978 National Conference of Catholic Bishops called Environment and Art in Catholic Worship. This book gives architectural guidelines which any new or remodeled Catholic church in this country must follow.

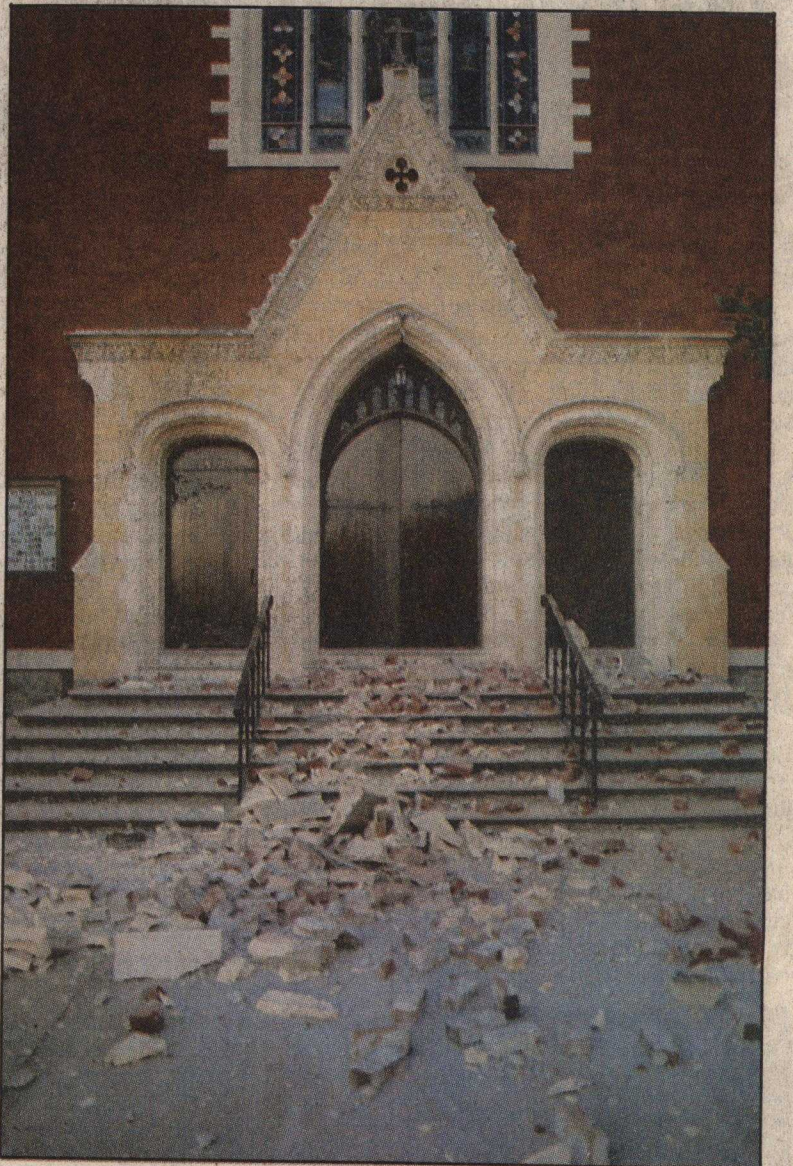
"The changes affect the way people worship," said Miller. "In the old churches, people were looking at the back of someone's head. But the main point is the people who have assembled together to worship God." "With the altar in the middle, it belongs to everyone," he said. "It is not my personal property."

But the biggest controversy involves the new baptismal font. The large, fountain-like font gurgles at the main entrance, and some parishioners complain it's too loud if you're sitting near it.

Miller said as a symbol, a large prominent font is superior to a small old-fashioned one tucked away in a niche. "All this water is a better symbol of God's grace than just a little bit."

He also said the church is moving toward total immersion in baptism. The new guidelines set down by the bishops call for the total immersion of infants, and at least the pouring of water over the entire body of a child or adult.

Ida Bobeda was baptized at St. Patrick's 69 years ago, and has attended ever since. She said she is not as comfortable with the interior of the new church, "but I know that's be-



Mike McCollum

Badly-damaged St. Patrick's church after quake.

cause I'm an old lady."

"What goes on on the altar is most important," she said. "I love the Eucharist. But the old church gave me a warm feeling when I walked in the door. I miss that."

Bobeda said she misses having the blessed sacrament by the door when she enters. It is

now housed in the tabernacle at back. She said she also misses all the symbols.

"Father Miller is a wonderful person. But he is a product of the '60s. He can go out in the sand and worship. But the old-timers have a different attitude," Bobeda said.

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CHURCH

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The interior of the old church was rich in decoration, whereas the new interior is Spartan.

Parishioner Tom Sullivan, who has attended St. Patrick's for 10 years, said the church is still "a little too barren." But he said he likes a lot of the changes.

"It's much lighter now. The old church was pretty dark."

The church will be acquiring more statuary soon, and a new crucifix has been ordered.

Tim Griffin has attended St. Patrick's since the mid-'60s. He said he understands why the changes were made. "It's progress. But when you do it to someone's religion, it's kind of hard to take."

For four years after the earthquake, St. Patrick's held services in the parish hall on Brommer Street. Griffin said this was a good transition.

"I like statues and the interior

surroundings of the church to a degree," he said. "But it's what you're hearing and feeling inside those walls that's important."

Miller said the time in the parish hall was special, and some of his flock actually missed the hall when they moved back to the church in May.

"In the hall, we learned how to be more friendly with each other," Miller said. "There's something about disorder that brings people closer together."