

## ASSUMPTION CHURCH



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

The Rev. Francisco Montes speaks to parishioners during at the newly remodeled Assumption Church in Pajaro on Sunday.

# Church made new again

Parishioners celebrate first Mass in newly remodeled house of worship

By CATHY KELLY

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PAJARO — Good things come to those who wait, and after waiting decades, parishioners at Assumption Church celebrated Mass in a vastly remodeled church this weekend.

The \$1.7 million reconstruction began last year and masses were held in classrooms adjacent to the church for months.

But this weekend, they were held in the remade Catholic church for the first time.

Sister Sandra Silva said the fundrais-

ing quest seemed at times to last "forever," entailing countless tamale sales and other volunteer-fueled events. Yet it was sorely needed.

"It was a very humble little church," Silva said. "The roof had problems. We didn't have large donations; most of the parish are working people. But it's gorgeous. It's like a dream come true."

It was bright inside despite the rainy skies Sunday, with a new stormy and angelic mural of the Assumption of Mary on a prominent wall above the altar.

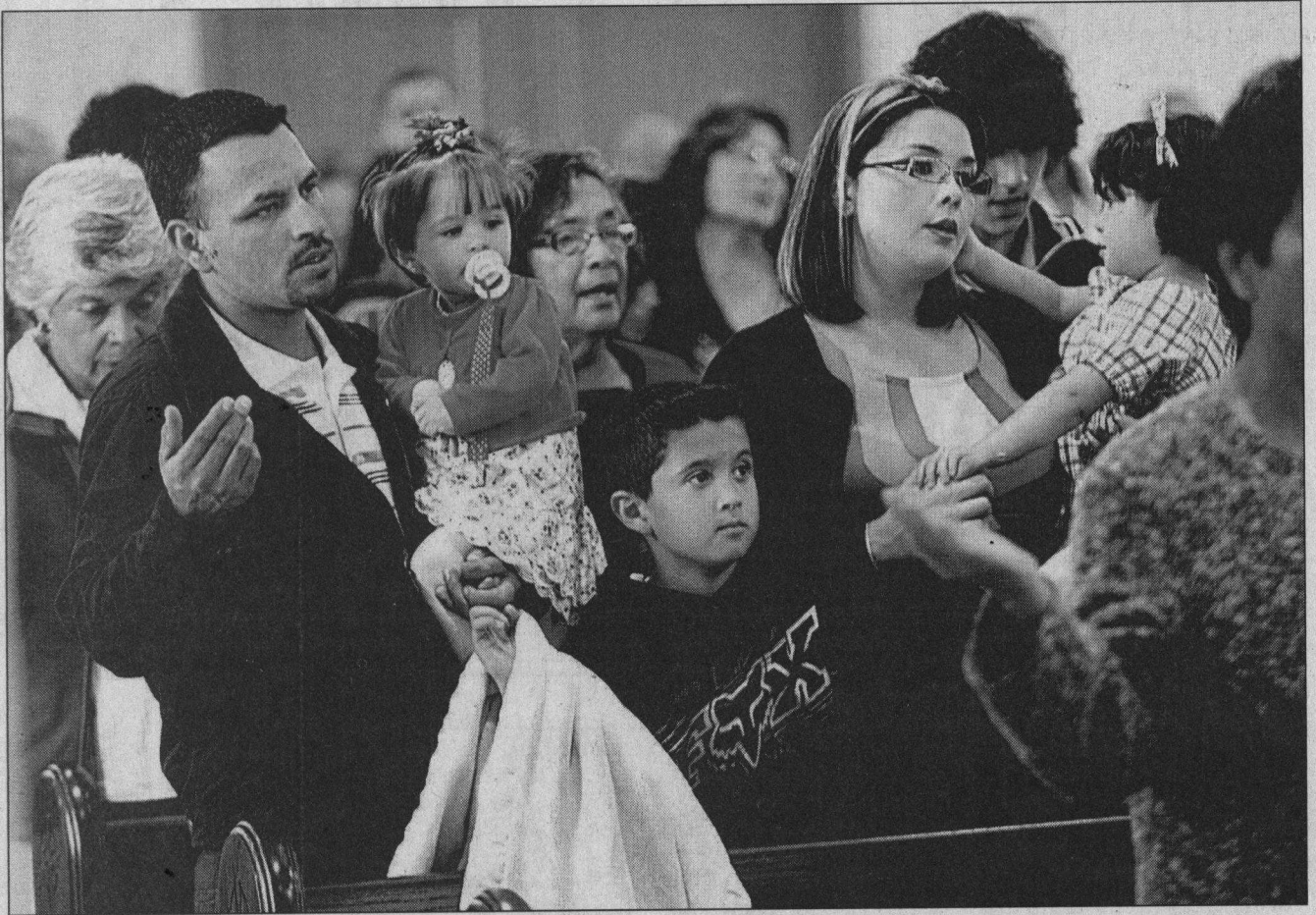
Following a homily about perseverance,

the Rev. Francisco Montes told the congregation it was their common house and a house of God.

Montes, an associate pastor, said God always answers prayers, though the answer might be "not yet," or "here is something better." He also told the congregation not to chew gum inside.

The new church is definitely an improvement, said Martha Guzman, 44, of Watsonville, who has attended services there since she was a child.

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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

A young family joins hands as they celebrate Mass Sunday at the newly remodeled Assumption Church in Pajaro.

## CHURCH

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"It's much nicer and more up to date," Guzman said. "We're very happy."

The makeover of the 54-year-old church on Pajaro's main street, Salinas Road, was launched by the Rev. Walter Espinoza.

He said parishioners, mostly poor fieldworkers, told him they had been waiting 25 years to fix up the church. They raised the money through donations, taco and tamale sales after Sunday masses, and festivals and chicken barbecues.

Some ministry groups volunteered to raise the money for certain aspects of the remodel, such as the altar, Silva said.

"It was bit by bit, piece by piece," she said. "It's really wonderful."

In an early interview, Espinoza said he hoped the project would not only serve as a place



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Panch Alvarez lights a votive candle before Mass at the newly remodeled Assumption Church in Pajaro on Sunday.

to worship but also a source of parish and community pride and empowerment.

"It's not about the money," he said. "It's about will. ... You can achieve whatever you want if you break down the barriers in your own mind. This is the proof."

In both a physical and spiritual sense, the church is a center in a town marked by pov-

erty and neglect.

Though part of Monterey County, it functions as a Watsonville neighborhood. Yet residents are not eligible to receive city services or participate in its political processes.

The design transformed the church into the type of Mission-style temple common in Mexican towns and the addi-

tion at the front facing the road expanded its capacity.

The congregation is about 4,000 strong, with five masses in Spanish on Sundays and one 10:30 a.m. Mass in English.

The walnut and walnut burl altar was handcrafted by Live Oak woodworker Jim Hanson. The middle of three arches in the altar was designed to hold bone fragment relics.

All the symbolically rich art, and all that has been accomplished, is inspirational, said Elizabeth Jara, 17, a member of the church choir.

"We had so many festival and carnivals to raise money," she said. "It's important. Everyone comes here together to celebrate."

Carmel Valley artist Linda Walker donated her time to paint the Stations of the Cross and lilies that surround the mural, and to restore several statues, Silva said. The remodel was designed by architect Thomas Lukes of Salinas, she said.