

# Churches - 1990 SPIRITS REBORN

They each took a direct hit from the earthquake, but the parishes of Holy Cross and St. Patrick's have come back with renewed faith

By TOM STEVENS  
Special to the Sentinel

**F**IVE YEARS ago this week, Holy Cross parishioners were enjoying the new look of their handsome Santa Cruz church, which had just undergone a thorough restoration for its centennial year. And in Watsonville, St. Patrick's Catholic Church had just launched a free meal program for its members, many of them hard-hit by the decline of the local food packing industry.

Then everything changed. For 15 endless seconds on Oct. 17, 1989, the earth shook with near-biblical ferocity, bringing both parishes to their knees. The stately brick churches that had stood for decades at the center of parish life absorbed massive structural damage and their congregations were crushed in a different way.

"We kind of went into a cocoon," recalls the Rev. Mike Marini of Holy Cross. "In that time after the earthquake, there was a lot of depression and we lost some membership." As depressing in its own way as the 1989 temblor was a fire eight months later that razed the Holy Cross parish hall where services had been moved after the quake. "We're just beginning to come out of that and develop now," Marini said.

At St. Patrick's in the months after Loma Prieta, the Rev. Mike Miller and his parish faced an agonizing choice: raise more than \$5 million to fully restore their crippled 86-year-old church, or raise \$3.9 million to build a replacement. Both goals seemed hopelessly out of reach.

But on Monday, five years to the day after the great quake, St. Patrick's will officially dedicate its new Main Street church, a building with more light and more room than its predecessor, but with the same 35 stained glass windows that glowed gently down on generations of Watsonville worshippers.

Parishioners in Santa Cruz also faced a massive rebuilding project — a four-year, \$1.5 million effort that overcame cost escalations and planning hurdles that would try the patience of a saint.

"For a long time, people just saw scaffolding and fencing everywhere," Marini recalls. "But once they began to see things happen — walls painted, cracks repaired — they got a lot happier. And then, of course, they got impatient. Anybody who's ever built a house knows that feeling."

For Marini and his 3,000 parishioners, the turning point came in an unlikely setting: the portable plastic dome that replaced the burned-out Holy Cross parish hall.

"I think there was a spirit born when we were in the pavilion," he says. "It was the spirit of the people who hung around, who didn't go some place else because another

church was warmer. Having experienced something like that, they look at the rest of what needs to be done with a lot less apprehension, more faith in the leadership, and a bit more patience. I think there's a lot more hope for the future."

St. Patrick's Miller also feels the earthquake unified and strengthened his 4,000-member parish.

"For a lot of people in the congregation, and for the town, for that matter, what happened to the church is a parable of ourselves," he says. "The earthquake shook us down to our foundations, and we had to regroup and put ourselves back together again. This whole process has renovated us on the

inside. We're friendlier with each other now and we're bigger."

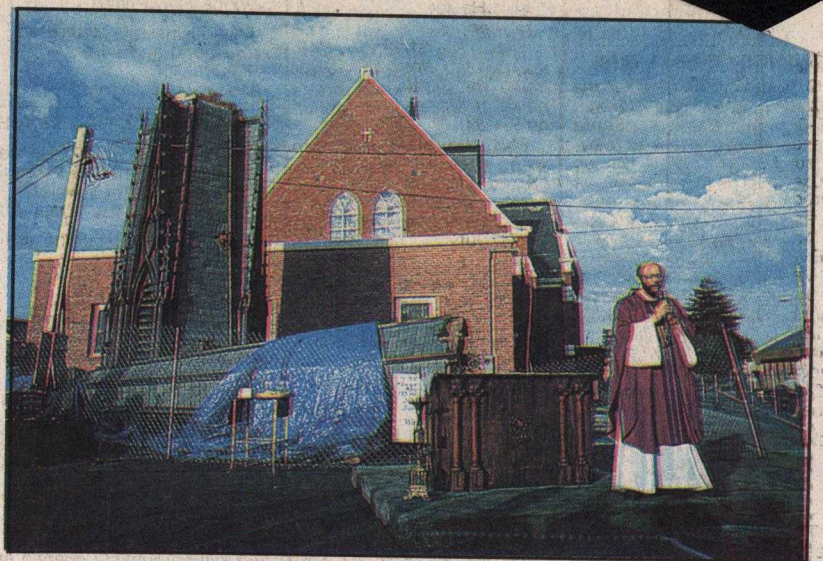
Miller cites a second, unanticipated "blessing," the growth of the church's "loaves and fishes" food pantry program.

"We had just opened a modest pantry when the earthquake hit," he says. "And then food came pouring in from all over the country. The program got big and it has remained quite big." In operation

five years this week, the program now serves 100 free lunches each weekday and reaches an estimated 1,500 patrons monthly. Since January this year, 10,000 hot lunches have been served and a thousand boxes of groceries distributed. "In addition to trying to feed ourselves," Miller says, "we've been feeding the town."

Tom Stevens is a Santa Cruz-based freelance writer.

Bishop Sylvester Ryan will take part in a special ceremony and Mass at 7:30 p.m. Monday dedicating St. Patrick's. The church is located at 721 Main St.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file  
The Rev. Mike Miller celebrates Mass outside the damaged St. Patrick's Church after the 1989 Loma Prieta Earthquake.

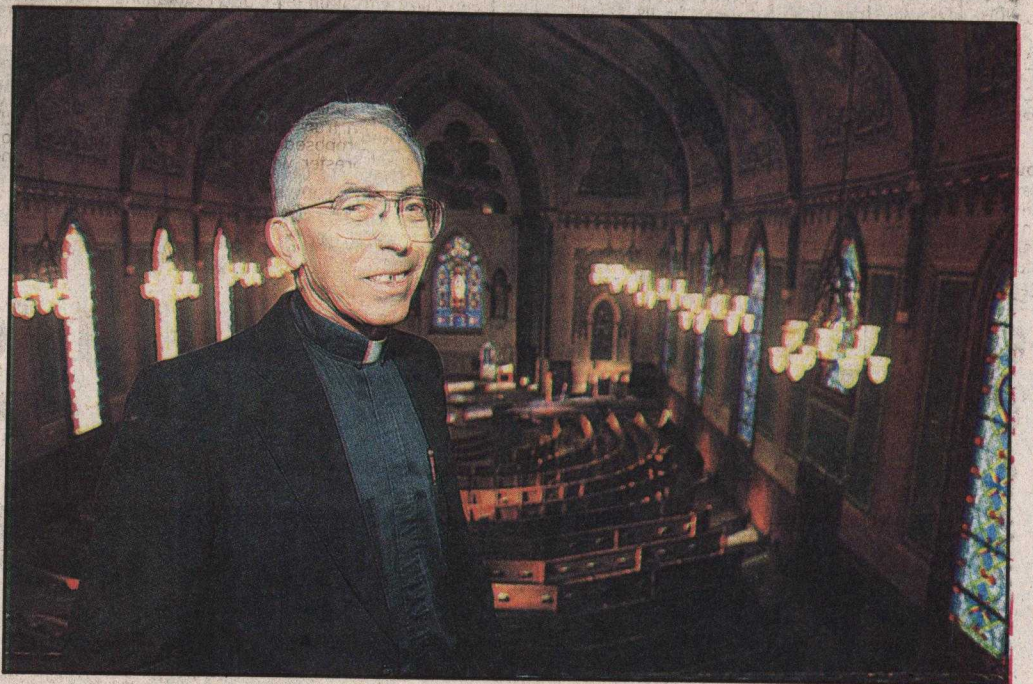


Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file  
On May 26, the parishioners of St. Patrick's celebrated the first Mass in their rebuilt church.

## FIVE YEARS

15 seconds

The Sentinel's series on the five-year anniversary of the Loma Prieta earthquake continues Sunday



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel file  
A reason to smile: the Rev. Mike Marini of Holy Cross celebrated the first Mass in the rebuilt church on Christmas Eve of last year.