

Pilgrimage to Our Past, Journey to our Future

In September 2008, in honor of St. Anne Parish's Centennial year, 13 parishioners set out on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. They joined the countless pilgrims over the centuries who have sought to renew their faith by going to the places where the patriarchs, matriarchs, prophets and apostles encountered God. It wasn't so much a trip as it was a spiritual journey.

"There's a difference in the way a person approaches it," said pastoral coordinator Ron Ryan. "You go on a trip to travel or sight-see. A person goes on a pilgrimage to be in a place where people have experienced God for thousands of years."

The Holy Land is the birthplace of Christianity with some of its most sacred sites: Bethlehem, where Jesus was born; Nazareth, Jesus' hometown and the site of the Church of the Annunciation and Mary's Well; Jerusalem, where Jesus taught and celebrated the Last Supper; Golgotha (sometimes called Calvary), where he was crucified, and St. Anne's Church, an important site for our parish.

The Centennial Pilgrimage spent weeks before the journey prayerfully preparing. Some went with specific intentions for themselves. But all also went as a pilgrimage for our parish—praying that our community might be blessed and renewed.

What does St. Anne have to teach us today? What can we learn from her example that will prepare us

for the next 100 years of the parish? What can we learn from our past that will prepare us for the future of the parish? These were some of the questions the pilgrims contemplated on their journey, questions that concern all members of the parish today and into the next century.

They visited many important religious sites, including Nazareth, Cana,

the Sea of Galilee, Mount of the Beatitudes, Qumran, Masada, the Dead Sea, the Mount of Olives, the Via Dolorosa, the Holy Sepulcher, the Church of St. Anne.

"You cannot read scripture the same way after having been to these places," said William Hickman. "At Christmas most of the songs are about Bethlehem and the shepherds. We not

only were in Nativity Square in Bethlehem, but we saw the hills where the shepherds watched their flocks by night."

"The pilgrimage to the Holy Land was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream for me!" said Sister Ethna Marie O'Doherty, SNJM. "The pilgrimage made Sacred Scripture come alive and made me pray more fervently for a lasting peace in that very special area of the world."

"It reaffirmed and strengthened my faith," said Janice Orth. "It deepened my friendship with my fellow travelers. It was great to have time with my daughter Jean and to share those memories."



Members of the St. Anne Centennial Pilgrimage begin their walk from the Mount of Olive to the Old City of Jerusalem.

The pilgrims carried with them two St. Anne medallions used in the parish during the 80s, with the inscription: St. Anne Parish, Seattle / Centennial Pilgrimage / 2008. A different pilgrim wore the medallion each day; it was her/his special responsibility to pray for our parish community that day, especially at the various shrines they visited.

“The experience is really one that cannot be expressed in words,” said Ron Ryan. “The best I can do is to say that you experience the presence of God in a very tangible way. It is the land where God chose to reveal himself, to enter into creation, to walk among us. When you are there, you feel that presence in a different way; you feel a unique connection to those places—almost as if you have been there before—a feeling of being ‘home.’”

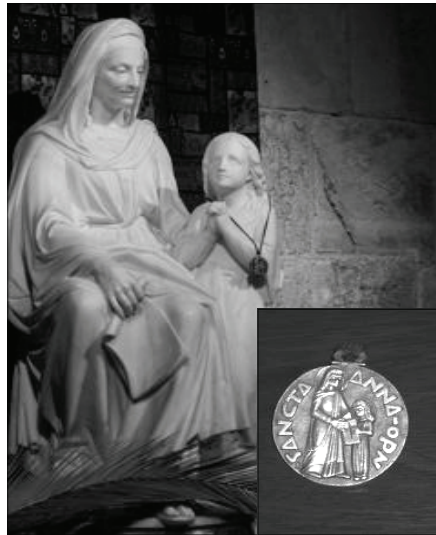
Visiting the Church of St. Anne

The highlight of the journey took place on Sunday, September 21, when the group attended Mass at St. Anne Church in Jerusalem, built on the traditional site of the home of St. Anne and St. Joachim, and the birthplace of the Blessed Virgin Mary. A third century writing, the Revelation of James, says that Joachim and Anne came to Jerusalem soon after their marriage. A prosperous shepherd with flocks on neighboring hills, Joachim supplied sheep for the sacrifices at the Temple. The couple lived in the neighborhood close by the Pool of Bethesda, where the sheep were purified. Though childless for many years, Anne eventually conceived in her old age, and in gratitude dedicated her daughter to the Lord. Mary entered the service of the Temple at a very young age, eventually meeting her husband, Joseph, at the Temple.

Devotion to St. Anne developed in the early years of the church. In the fourth century, a church dedicated to St. Anne was built. Because of the church’s proximity to the Pools of Bethesda and the healing sites associated with them, St. Anne Church became a pilgrimage site for those seeking

healing. The oldest church dedicated to our patron saint, the present building was constructed in 1050 and is regarded as one of the finest examples of Crusader architecture.

“We were very surprised to find that—in this very crowded city—we were the only ones at the church other than the priest and the six French nuns who staff it,” said Ron Ryan. “They were all very welcoming, inviting us up to the altar, saying the Mass in English (rather than their French) and asking me to lector.”



The group left an engraved medallion at the Church of St. Anne; a second medallion was brought back Seattle.

St. Anne's acoustics, designed for Gregorian chant, are so perfect the church is virtually a musical instrument to be played by the human voice. Pilgrims come to sing in the church throughout the day. The church's acoustics are most amazing when used by a soprano or a tenor solo voice.

“It isn’t an overstatement to say that the singing of the sisters sounded angelic,” said Ron Ryan. “The priest kindly prayed and preached in

English and made special mention of St. Anne Parish in Seattle during the prayers of the Mass. I think we all felt the hospitality, presence and intercession of our patron saint in a very real way.”

As a memento of the pilgrimage, the group left a medallion at the statue of St. Anne and Mary. A second medallion was carried by the group throughout their pilgrimage; it was brought back to Seattle where it hangs in the Parish Office.

St. Anne Parish at a Crossroads

As St. Anne Parish approaches its next hundred years, the figure of St. Anne can help chart a course for the future. She belonged to both the Old Testament and the New Testament. She was a Jewish woman, married to one of the Jewish priests, living in the heart of the City of Jerusalem, steeped in the laws and traditions and cultures of her people. But she also was the mother of Mary, whose Son brought a new covenant. It was Anne who instilled in Mary an openness to God, so that

when the Angel Gabriel brought her God's message, Mary was able to respond with faith and trust.

"Anne teaches us to be open, to be trusting, to recognize that God's ways are usually not our ways," said Ron Ryan. "I think we need to be open to change in our next century—as a parish, as a people, and as a society. The example—and the intercession—of St. Anne can help."

"She was a great example of a quiet, peaceful, patient, accepting woman," said Janice Orth. "Don't sweat the small stuff."

What does St. Anne have to teach us about the future of our parish? What are the challenges the parish faces? The opportunities that await us? Where is God calling us?

To answer these questions, it's useful to define what makes the parish distinctive. Despite the current recession, St. Anne Parish remains a wealthy parish, both in terms of the financial resources of its members and their many talents.

"The most distinctive quality is probably the amount of education and sophistication of today's families," said Father John Bowman, "and the financial opportunities that go with it. The families of 2008 and forward are very different from those of 1940 or 1955 or 1973. The social/economic circumstances are changed. Unless we understand what these parents want for their children—and how to align that with faith and church—we probably will not accomplish much. The parish must adapt to the kind of families we serve. To align these families to Christ and the church is a great opportunity."

As a highly educated parish, St. Anne Parish has the opportunity to use these specialized skills and gifts to make a difference in the world.

"Many of our parishioners are lawyers, health care professionals, executives or own and operate their own businesses," said Ron Ryan. "These are people who know how to make things happen. And they are also in positions that impact our world and society. This is a great resource to our community."

The intergenerational character of the parish also makes St. Anne unique. The graying of the parish in the 80s and 90s has given way to a youth movement, with many young families joining the community. The thriving parish school has played a key part in this, bringing young families into the parish, ensuring a vibrant future.

"One of the strengths of St. Anne Parish is its intergenerational character," said Ron Ryan. "We have senior adults, empty nesters, school-aged families, young adults and children—all who are active parishioners. We have within our community a wealth of wisdom and experience, and an abundance of enthusiasm and energy. Not every parish has such richness."

The parish also benefits from being located in the heart of Seattle, often touted by national magazines as one of the most livable cities in the nation. As such, it attracts people from all around the country and world.

"We are a dynamic parish community," said Carmen Suazo, chair of the Pastoral Council. "We have the benefit of parishioners who have been here for generations as well as parishioners who are new to this part of the country. We have a mix of established ideas and new thoughts and practices from around the country."

The Challenges Ahead

With the renovation of the school and church completed, the parish enters a new phase in its history. It can justly be proud of updating and enhancing its physical plant and surroundings. These accomplishments did not come easily. Hundreds of parishioners donated their time, talents and treasure to make it happen. The new school facility is not only safer, but immensely more useful and attractive. The renovated church expresses the Catholic Church's guidelines on worship space and adds a beautiful, brightened facility to our community.

Now that we've accomplished these goals, what lies ahead? With the major elements of these building projects accomplished, we have the opportunity to focus our energies on new missions. What are we called to do as a parish? How

can we invest our time, energy, and finances to help us become an even more vibrant parish community?

“I think the main challenge we face is the same one that every parish faces: to avoid becoming complacent and to be challenged by the Gospel to be people who go out and lay down our lives for the world,” said Father Bowman. “Every community has a tendency to turn in on itself, to become comfortable. But we need to remember that we are called to go out into our neighborhoods, our workplaces, and our society and make a real difference.”

Despite the wealth of its members, the parish faced financial challenges beginning in 2004. Interest income was lost when the parish savings was spent on the school renovation and construction of Banchemo Hall. Income was also lost when the Archdiocese separated the administration of St. Margaret and St. Anne Parishes. The parish budget was cut back in 2006, 2007 and 2008. Some staff positions were eliminated; other staff members had their hours scaled back. Program funding was cut across the board.

“Challenges for the parish include finding ways to increase monetary support and to develop outreach programs that will meet the needs of the young families, the youth, the young adults and the elderly,” said St. Anne School principal Pat Durand. “It’s important to be able to catechize young families that return to the church because their children are entering school. The challenge for the school is to keep classes filled, raise enough funds to operate without much parish subsidy, and continue to keep teacher pay at 100 percent of Washington State scale.”



Leadership for the Future

The parish also needs strong participation and leadership—from individual members, pastoral council and commission members, the pastoral coordinator and parochial vicar—to meet the challenges of the next 100 years. Over the past century, the parish has struggled when parishioners didn’t support parish plans or projects, or when the leadership didn’t mesh with the community. Leadership and community working together has made the parish flourish.

“The role of a pastor or pastoral coordinator is not to provide the vision or to solve all the problems,” said Ron Ryan. “If that happens it creates a very weak parish community. One of my main interests as pastoral coordinator is to call forth and develop lay leadership from within the community itself. That’s what our councils and commissions are all about—people with a passion, skills and gifts for a particular part of our parish life, who can help us grow and develop in that area. We have a great opportunity to develop dynamic parish leadership.”

If we’ve learned anything as a parish from the last 100 years, it’s that God isn’t finished with us yet. The parish continues to grow and change. Priests come and go. Our buildings go up, get renovated and are torn down. The neighborhood changes from mostly German families to Italian families, from blue collar workers to white collar. Single family homes give way to condominiums, coffee houses and sushi restaurants. St. Anne Parish is a work in progress; we will continue to change and need to change in response to the divine wind of the Holy Spirit, blowing through our hearts in the years to come.