

Black Diamond parish translates Christ's love into action

Ministries, social events foster community at St. Barbara Church

BLACK DIAMOND
BY JEAN PARIETTI

St. Barbara Church, Black Diamond



The new St. Barbara Church, left, was built in 1997. The old church, right, remains a popular chapel for weddings.

Founded: Aug. 17, 1912

Registered households: 796

Pastor: Father Chuck Palluck (became parochial vicar on July 1)

Address: 32416 Sixth Ave., Black Diamond

Phone: 360-886-2229

Website: www.stbarbarachurch.org

Pastors (Source: Parish History written in 1962)

Father Aloysius Mlinar 1912

Father Anthony Hack, OSB 1915

Father Lawrence Piotrkowski,
OSB 1921, 1931, 1933

Father Louis Carey, OSB 1924

Father Leo Hansen, OSB 1929, 1931

Father Vincent Carey, OSB 1929, 1930

Father Basil McDonald, OSB 1929

Father Martin Toner, OSB 1930

Father Albert 1931

Father Edward 1931

Father Jerome Toner, OSB 1935

Father Raphael Heider, OSB 1936

Father Alphonse Fuchs, OSB 1940

Father John McCorristin 1944

Father John McLoughlin, MM 1952

Father John Horan 1953

Father Paul Byrne 1960

Father Charles Crosse 1961

Father Richard E. Mitchell 1973

Father M. Charles Palluck 1975

A joyful, welcoming spirit is alive in the community of St. Barbara Church.

“There’s really a strong spirit of love that Father Chuck (Palluck) has helped to generate,” said longtime parishioner Brooke Dillon.

“Everybody is just like open arms,” said Bill Hecker, a former member of the pastoral council. For instance, the ushers and bread ministers greet those arriving for Mass, shaking their hands as they make their way into church, he said. After church, parishioners and visitors can get in line for a hug – or a handshake if they prefer – from Father Palluck, who has been pastor for 33 years, or retired Father Ron Funke, S.J., who helps out on weekends. “Some people take the fast lane and don’t get a hug,” Hecker said, but plenty more stand in line.

Nestled in the shadow of Mount Rainier, the lively Black Diamond parish draws members from several surrounding communities. Many find their faith lives enriched by Father Palluck’s sermons, which Hecker described as motivational, usually profound and always about Christ’s love.

Good builders

The community translates the message of love into a variety of ministries and social events. Ministries include Circle of Joy, the women’s social outreach group; Sacramentors, the men’s spiritual group; and a social justice commission, created about a year ago. There’s interest in starting a nursing ministry, as well as the “JustFaith” social justice education program, said Dillon, who serves on the social justice commission.

St. Barbara’s religious education program involves about 150 volunteers; while children are in class, parents can attend the popular “Catholic Stuff” adult education sessions. The parish supports the Maple Valley Food Bank, Catholic Community Services in Kent, Friends of the Orphans in Latin America and Habitat for Humanity – in fact, the parish is raising money to buy property for a Habitat house, Father Palluck said.

Youth group members volunteer with local Habitat chapters. “They love it when the St. Barbara youth group shows up,” Father Palluck said. “They’re such good builders. Our teens have such a great reputation for that.”

Money never seems to be a problem for the parish, although the priests “never harp on tithing,” Hecker said. But just before the collection is taken up at each Mass, the priest thanks the congregation in advance for helping pay a particular expense, like the power bill or elevator maintenance, Hecker explained.

That approach works, he said: “Everybody at the church just gives.” For instance, the parish’s \$2.2 million loan for the new church building, completed in 1997, was paid off about five years early, Hecker noted.

Special events range from children’s Masses followed by dinner, to the July pig roast, which involved roasting two whole pigs until “we discovered people liked garlic-stuffed pork loin better,” Father Palluck said, laughing.

Every summer, the pastor leads four Saturday hikes in the nearby Cascade foothills. “It’s a real community builder,” he said. This is likely the last year of those hikes, however, as Father Palluck reduces his workload before becoming a senior priest next summer. On July 1, he becomes parochial vicar and Kareen Kasprzyk comes on board as pastoral coordinator.

“It’s going to be a huge change for the parish, especially with the priest shortage,” Dillon said. Although there will be a sense of loss, “a church is not about one person,” she said. “It has to be about the community.”

Parish History

Black Diamond was established as a coal-mining community on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains in the late 19th century. According to a parish history compiled on the occasion of St. Barbara's 50th Anniversary, a majority of the mostly Catholic immigrants to the rugged wilderness were from Italy and Austria.

After many years being served only occasionally by priests from surrounding cities, Father Aloysius Mlinar, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Enumclaw began saying Mass in Black Diamond every fourth Sunday beginning in 1908 in the town's union hall. Plans for construction of a church began in 1910 under the leadership of Father Mlinar, who became St. Barbara's first pastor when Bishop Edward J. O'Dea officially established it as a parish on Aug. 17, 1912.

Benedictine fathers assumed care of the parish for a period of 25 years when Father Mlinar departed in 1915. The Rev. Anthony Hack was the first Benedictine pastor and the first resident pastor among 11 members of the Benedictine order – several who apparently remained for only a matter of months. In those early days, serving Catholics in the communities of Taylor, Ravensdale and Franklin were part of the parish mission and generous parish members provided Father Hack with transportation between parishes.

Coal-mining was the community's bread and butter but it also left a legacy of disasters and grief for parish members, and strikes and disputes between labor and management took their toll on both the community and the parish, according to the parish history.

Mother Nature also inflicted damage on the original church, which had been constructed at a cost of \$2,724.45 during Father Mlinar's pastorate. The building was "twisted out of shape by a strong east wind" in 1934. Father Lawrence Piotrkowski, who had assumed his third tenure as pastor, bought iron work for \$5.45 and cable for \$6 that "kept the building straight for many years."

July 1942 marked the end of the Benedictine pastorates and the parish was served by priests of Sacred Heart Parish in Enumclaw until Maryknoll Father John McLoughlin was appointed pastor in 1952.