

# Our History of Saint Mary Star of the Sea Catholic Church Port Townsend, Washington



*This is what Capt. Vancouver saw when he first encountered Port Townsend. This remote and forlorn looking point of land currently known as Point Hudson would become the home of the first Catholic Church in Port Townsend – (at the far right middle of the picture.)*

Capt. George Vancouver was the first European explorer to sail into this area in the spring of 1792 and named it Port Townshend after his friend, the 1st Marquis Townshend, an army officer, politician and artist. Port Townshend was on the nautical charts thereafter, but it wasn't until 1851 that the first pioneers settled on this sandy spit of land beneath the bluffs.

That spring Alfred Plummer arrived from the California gold fields, selected a homestead and registered a claim with the surveyor general's office in Olympia, making Port Townsend the first permanent American settlement on the Olympic Peninsula. Other settlers soon followed, and in 1854 the town was designated a U.S. Customs Port for the Washington Territory, thus cementing its status as a major seaport in the Puget Sound.

By 1859, over 300 new settlers and 200 S'Klallam lived in Port Townsend, and the waterfront sported at least 50 wooden structures, including docks, warehouses, stores, offices, hotels and saloons. The first Catholic missionary to visit the locality was Father Louis Rossi, who was in charge of the Cowlitz Mission. On May 3, 1859, a contract was let for a church to be built at the corner of Water and Jackson Streets (former site of the Landfall Restaurant and currently a vacant lot across the street from the Northwest Maritime Center), dedicated to St. Anthony. This was the first church built in Port Townsend and third Catholic mission in the territory.

Father Rossi arrived in the Northwest in December 1856 when the then-Diocese of Nisqually (later renamed Seattle) was only six years old. He was a native of Ferrara, Italy and the son of

Jewish parents. He converted to Catholicism at age 19 and set out just two years later to become a Passionist priest. Though blessed with a sense of humor, his quick temper and inability to get along with his novice master prompted his dismissal from his first community. He had threatened the novice master with a large Easter candle. Moving to France, Father Rossi learned French and joined another religious community that also dismissed him.

Then the first bishop of Nisqually, A.M.A. Blanchet, recruited the young priest for his wilderness territory. After arriving in Montreal, Father Rossi, at the bishop's request, recruited five Sisters of Providence for the mission. They included Mother Joseph, who would go on to establish some 30 hospitals, schools and orphanages in the Northwest.

Father Rossi's ministry extended from Olympia to the Canadian border. He had an enormous task and endured great suffering and hardships spreading the gospel to his far-flung congregations, traveling on mud-clogged roads by foot and horseback and on the waters by canoe and paddlewheel. While living at Fort Steilacoom, Father Rossi had surgery twice for unknown health problems, which eventually forced him to return to Europe.

In October 1860, Father Charles Varry took over the duties of Father Rossi. He was succeeded in May 1864 by Father F.X. Prefontaine, who became the first resident pastor of the parish. Our centennial celebration in 1964 and our sesquicentennial celebration this year, 2016, marked this event. Father Prefontaine remained in Port Townsend until 1867 when he moved to Seattle where a memorial fountain was later named for him.

Father Paul Manz followed Father Prefontaine, and he was succeeded a short time later by Father Richard. During his tenure, one acre of land was bought in 1877 for the Catholic cemetery along today's San Juan Avenue. Father Caesari Mausuetto came to Port Townsend in 1878 and remained as pastor for two years.

### **St. Anthony's Church (1859-1880)**

Eight years after Port Townsend's founding by Alfred Plummer, the first church edifice ever built was that of our Catholic parish. Begun by a missionary, Father Louis Rossi, in 1859, the site was in Point Hudson at Jackson and Water Streets. A simple building, it neighbored the Charles Hotel.

St. Anthony's first resident pastor, Father Prefontaine, arrived in 1864, remaining for three years before transferring to Seattle (he was so loved in Seattle that a fountain was later named to honor his memory). 1877 brought the acquisition of our Parish Cemetery on San Juan Avenue, followed by the arrival of Father Regis Maniouloux in 1880. For the next forty years he led our parish to new heights,



*St. Anthony's Church  
1859-1880*

but oddly enough, during that time, the seeds of our destruction were being planted and they would ultimately shake the very foundations of our parish, both figuratively and literally.

### **St. Mary Star of the Sea (1881-1919)**

Two lots at the corner of Taylor and Franklin Streets became available for his use, so in 1882 Father Maniouloux, with money borrowed from his relatives in France, there built a new church, renamed it St. Mary Star of the Sea, and furnished it with several fine French made statues. He also persuaded two French nuns, his own sister, Sister Emmanuel, and a cousin, Sister Madeline, to join him in Port Townsend. Both nuns served faithfully until their deaths. A rectory was built next to the church (it still stands, restored to much the way it looked at the turn of the century).



*The first St. Mary's Church  
(1881-1919)*

Around 1912, Father Maniouloux's niece, Jeanne Bessy, arrived from France to serve as housekeeper. Although she was strongly anti-Catholic (a Huguenot), her uncle kept her in line, but only up until his death in 1919 (his grave is located in our parish cemetery). His possessions, which included the church, rectory, and furnishings, reverted to his heir, niece Jeanne Bessy. Miss Bessy's first order of business was to lock the parishioners out of the church. She demanded \$10,000 not to foreclose on the mortgage. She was offered \$5,000, which she refused, and foreclosed. Enraged, she smashed the French made statues and sold the stained glass, vestments and vessels – many to other churches in Port Townsend. The church was demolished and a storage building was erected from the salvaged lumber. Church items which were unable to be sold remained there and deteriorated due to a leaky roof. In 1933, the parishioners finally retrieved the church records for \$85. By 1940, Miss Bessy, on State relief for a number of years, lost the church in lieu of overdue taxes. William Daly, a local attorney, arranged for the remaining statues to be returned to the parish.

Addison Lewis, a local non-Catholic and friend of the then pastor, Father McGrath, restored the statues, without charge. Two of the five statues, one of St. Anthony, were donated to another parish. The remaining three are in our current church (Our Lady and St. Joseph with Infant on either side of the altar, and Our Lady of Dolours, in the vestibule).

### **St. Mary Star of the Sea (1919-1945)**

After the church property was foreclosed upon, Mass was celebrated in the Odd Fellows' Hall on Lawrence Street for several months until the old Swedish Methodist Church on Blaine and Pierce

Streets was purchased for \$250. A house diagonally across the street was purchased to serve as the rectory and both structures were in very poor condition. At the same time, Father Frederick Klein was named pastor. His sister, Francesca, arrived from Germany to serve as housekeeper. Over the next several years dissension started to grow. In 1929 Father Klein thought building a school might help foster cooperation so he purchased property for \$2,300 which over the next ten years devalued to just \$500, angering parishioners even more. Father Klein, discouraged and suffering from arthritis and other ailments brought on by the dampness and drafts inherent in the poor structures of the church and rectory, resigned and returned to Germany in 1932. There he continued to serve mankind, in particular the Jews who were being persecuted under Adolf Hitler. He was ultimately sentenced to a concentration camp for his acts and died there in 1939. His sister, Francesca, married Henry Neumann, and they remained in Port Townsend until their deaths.

Father Peter Smythe replaced Father Klein and parish dissension continued to flourish, to the degree that protest meetings were held in town and delegates visited the Diocese to submit many petty charges. Father Smythe developed arthritis because of the continuing poor condition of the parish buildings, and in 1935 resigned from the parish.



*St. Mary Star of the Sea  
(1919-1949)*

Enter Father Dillon, who found the parish in deplorable condition, both spiritually and materially. Winds sweeping through the church made it impossible to keep the altar candles lit and the faithful were forced to remain well bundled throughout Mass. A wood stove heated the church and the walls and ceilings were filthy. Ragged curtains covered the windows and the kneeling benches were splintered and broken. Even the vestments were filled with mold. As a result, at his first Mass, Father Dillon announced that until the church was cleaned, no further Masses would be said there. In the rectory, winds would raise the rugs from the floors and the coal stove smoked so badly, Father Dillon would often be forced outside and into the cold. He too began to suffer from arthritis. Spiritually, the parish was in even worse condition. The

majority of parishioners failed to attend Mass and had fallen away. The rebellious spirit of some of the remaining parishioners continued as they threatened to "fire" their pastor. He decided to respond by "tightening the reins" and took steps to enforce the rules of canon law, even forbidding the choir to sing any music not specifically designated by the Church. A non-Catholic man and his sons offered to repair the church without charge, which Father Dillon accepted. This brought additional criticism from a hardcore group of five men of the parish who continued to discredit their pastor at every turn.

They were petitioning the Diocese to make ours a Jesuit parish, since the Jesuit order owned Manresa Hall (now known as Manresa Castle), which they used as a tertianship hall (house of study). The remaining congregation did not join with the agitators and by 1942 the spirit of rebellion was fully extinguished and a new spirit of cooperation began to develop. World War II and an influx of newcomers were having a good influence on the parish. At last, for the first time in 22 years, St. Mary's seemed to be back on its feet.

During the years that followed, improvements were made and new furnishings were acquired. The church, without a baptismal font since 1919 when Miss Bessy sold it, was the recipient of a new cast stone font, purchased by Mrs. Henry Neumann (formerly Francesca Klein, housekeeper) in memory of her late brother, Father Klein (the former pastor who was martyred in Germany).

### **St. Mary Star of the Sea (1945-present)**

Father McGrath became pastor in 1945 and during his tenure a new church was built at Blaine and Van Buren Streets (the potential school property Father Klein purchased in 1929 and for which he was ostracized). Funds were raised via parish dinners, raffles and pledges of money. In addition to our three French statues, items brought from the old church included the baptismal font (which has since been replaced), the crucifix (which hangs in our current chapel), and our current Stations of the Cross. In 1953 Father Walsh became pastor and over the next five years, reduced parish debt by 50%. In 1958, his replacement, Father Rafferty, continued to earnestly reduce the debt in a spirit of fiscal responsibility, a lesson obviously learned earlier in the century. In 1961, \$60,000 in parishioner pledges began the building of a new CCD Center and rectory. The structures were completed, resulting in increased parish debt, partially reduced by the sale of the old rectory, then completely eliminated when the spirit of our former pastor, Father Klein, again came to the rescue in that his sister, Mrs. Henry Neumann (Francesca), died and bequeathed approximately \$150,000 to St. Mary's; a paradox, in that we were broken financially by one housekeeper, Jeanne Bessy, only to be restored to financial health by a subsequent housekeeper, Francesca, coincidentally both family members of the pastors they served. Some may call this a paradox, others a coincidence, still others a miracle!

In 1973 Father Desmond McMahon became pastor and in 1976 he arranged for our first Parish Directory. Later that year, the Holy Family Chapel was built in the church and in 1982, the classroom addition was made to the parish hall.

Father Raymond Heffernan was appointed pastor in 1986 and continued our traditions of fiscal

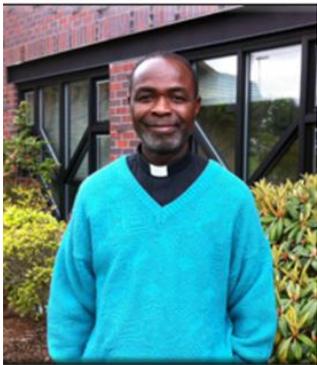
responsibility and adherence to canon law. At the same time, he placed focus on the religious education of our young people and encouraged them in greater service to and participation in our various parish groups. He semi-retired in 2002 to several other pastoral assignments one to the many parishes of the San Juan Islands.

Fathers Kurt Nagel and Gary Sumpter, whose extensive backgrounds in Catholic education proved invaluable to the young people of our parish, succeeded him.

Father Kurt Nagel went on to be the Pastor at Holy Family Parish in Kirkland, WA. Father Gary Sumpter was reassigned as vicar for two small parishes, Our Lady of the Redwoods in Garberville, CA and St. Patrick's Church in Scotia, CA.

Father John Topel, S. J. came to Port Townsend in 2005 as pastor of St. Mary's Star of the Sea, where he served until June 30, 2016. He came to St. Mary's after a long and impressive career in teaching, college administration and writing and shared these attributes abundantly with the parish. His sermons were especially appreciated where his past educational experiences added great depth and spiritual insights. Upon leaving St. Mary's he returned to his Jesuit Community at Seattle University in Seattle.

### **A Biography Father Peter Adoko-Enchill – Current Pastor**



Fr. Adoko-Enchill was born July 15, 1954, in a village in Ghana called Baifikrom. He was the third born of seven children. He entered St. Teresa's Minor Seminary (Elmina) at the age of 19. He completed his major studies at St. Peter's Regional Seminary (Cape Coast). Both his minor and major seminary studies were located in Ghana. In 2014, Fr. Adoko-Enchill's ordinary granted him permission to continue his ministry in the United States. Archbishop Sartain subsequently appointed him as Parochial Vicar to St. Mary's in Aberdeen. During his time at St. Mary's he also served the faith communities of Our Lady of Good Help (Hoquiam), St. Jerome's (Ocean Shores), and St. Paul's (Westport), Our Lady of the Olympics (Amanda Park), with the majority of his time spent serving the community of St. Anne's (Forks).

Fr. Peter has a passion for devotion to our Blessed Mother and prays the Holy Rosary always. Since his seminary formation period he has been involved for many years in the activities of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. He finds joy and inspiration in reading spiritual books including the Holy Bible. He is energized always by the Word of God, and most especially by daily visitation to the Blessed Sacrament in the church.

He would like to encourage the faithful to appreciate their call as Christians and have time always to communicate with the Lord by having daily quiet time. The Lord is always waiting for us. "Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7)

He was ordained to the priesthood in 1986, for the Archdiocese of Cape Coast, Ghana. Previously he served his diocese in Ghana as a parochial vicar, chaplain of a girl's high school,

and Spiritual Director for the minor seminary where he began his studies. He was also a Pastor and a Rector for a Minor Basilica in Ghana.

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## Welcome to St. Mary's Today!



*Our present church, dedicated in 1950.  
Photo by Victor and Josie Heins*

Today Saint Mary's remains the only Catholic Church in Jefferson County. While not large we have continued to grow and change in many different directions much the same as in the past. While we face many common challenges with other small parishes we feel ourselves abundantly blessed in our Priest, Father Peter, our parishioners, our church and the gracious protection and graces which our Loving Lord continues to shower upon us so abundantly. In having just passed our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary we look forward to the future with confidence in God's protection and guidance and his loving care in what may come.

And we are always mindful of the love of our Blessed Mother, Mary Star of the Sea who has watched over us with the love, compassion and protection that could come only from a mother's eye. Saint Mary, Star of the Sea, pray for us!



### **The Origin of the name "Star of the Sea"**

**"Saint Mary Star of the Sea** is an ancient title for the Virgin Mary. The words Star of the Sea are a translation of the Latin title *Stella Maris*.

\*\*\*A *special note of thanks* is extended to the late Mrs. Dorothy Plut who assisted in writing the history of St. Mary Star of the Sea. Mrs. Plut was a parishioner since her arrival in 1934.

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