

St. Boniface Catholic Church gets a makeover Ball and cross, installed in 1889, is replaced

Denise Ruttan, Statesman Journal, August 31, 2011

SUBLIMITY – For more than a century, the ball and cross atop the prodigious 100-foot steeple of St. Boniface Catholic Church has watched over the pioneer beginnings of Sublimity and the town's changes ever since.

After 122 years, it needed a remodeling.

"The steeple was roofed 12 years ago, but it wasn't done very efficiently," said Paul Denman, a retired construction superintendent and parishioner who volunteered to oversee the process. "It was leaking, and we had to replace it."

The project, which started July 20, took about a year to plan and a month to complete.

"At the same time, we decided to replace the ball and cross because it was in pretty dilapidated shape for its age," Denman said.

The ball and cross had not been worked on since it was installed in 1889. The classic piece will be stored and preserved in the St. Boniface Archives and Museum.

Pfeifer Roofing Inc. of Salem did the roof repair. Mike Adams Construction Co. of Stayton served as the general contractor.

Crews did not run into any dry rot or other issues, Denman said.

The church had to call in an exterminator to eradicate a bee's nest inside the ball, though.

The repairs cost about \$25,000, which came from the church's maintenance budget.

To repair the steeple, which is 100 feet tall and not accessible from the ground without expensive scaffolding, the church had to rent a 135-foot crane from Sunbelt Rentals in Salem to hoist crews skyward. The ball and cross is 7 feet tall.

"I wanted to get up there to see it and take some pictures, but others weren't as eager to get up there," Denman said.

While the church had use of the crane, it took the opportunity to do other repairs at the top.

Toward the end of the project, Father Irudayaraj Amalanathan, known to St. Boniface parishioners as Father Amal, rode the crane to the steeple to bless the new ball and cross.

"Hopefully, we will get another 30 years out of the roofing work that was done," Denman said.

Church history

1879: The First Catholic Church in honor of St. Boniface was a small vacant building on the east corner of Center and Maple streets.

1879: Father Peter Juvenal Stampfl arrived, a German via Minnesota. He wrote the first entry in the parish record Dec. 3, 1879, the official beginning of St. Boniface Church.

1880: The second Catholic church was the vacated Sublimity College just northeast of the present

church, including 20 acres, purchased by the Rev. Peter J. Stampfl. One acre was designated the Cemetery of the Angels.

1881-84: German priests from Mt. Angel Abbey served until the first permanent pastor arrived. The first rectory, a small two-room house used by the Swiss Rev. Wernher Ruettimann OSB, first pastor of St. Boniface, was east of the second church.

1885: Sisters arrived from Jordan and later became the Sisters of St. Mary of Oregon.

1888: The first parish school was built by Joseph Spenner west of the second church.

1888: Second rectory built just south of present rectory.

1888: The renamed Sisters of St. Mary opened the first parish school in Marion County.

1889: The college building addition was moved to where the present convent sits.

1889: Father Joseph Fessler arrived from Milwaukee and built the third and present St. Boniface church.

1895: Pastor Anthony Lainck of noble German parentage arrived via Gervais.

1902: Sublimity was incorporated.

1903: Father Lainck began driving his horse and buggy to Stayton to say Mass there on alternate Sundays in the new but unstaffed Stayton church.

1908: St. Boniface's separate bell tower built with three bells. Present church remodeled.

SOURCE: St. Boniface Archives and Museum