



Photo by Lori M. Nichols

Faithful fill the pews of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish the morning of Jan. 19 as the community celebrates the parish's 50th anniversary in Absecon.



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Music ministry members take part in the Mass celebrated by Bishop Dennis Sullivan.



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Father Cosme de la Peña visits with members of the parish community during the gala held at the Carriage House in Galloway.

Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish marks 50 years

By Crystal Herrera
Correspondent

ABSECON – On the morning of Jan. 19, the practice rooms of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish hummed with energy as the music ministry's guitarists adjusted their strings and choir members rehearsed their harmonies.

Attendees filtered into the pews, exchanging greetings with old friends and new faces, while others knelt in silent prayer. The church's bells rang through the crisp morning air, their echoes marking a milestone: the parish's 50th anniversary.

"Fifty years have passed," Bishop Dennis Sullivan said in his homily, "in which so many of the thankful have generously offered their gifts to the building of this faithful community."

A celebration of history, faith

Hundreds filled the church for the celebration of Mass, which was concelebrated by Coadjutor Bishop Joseph Williams; Father Cosme de la Peña and Father Logan Nilsen, parish pastor and parochial vicar, respectively; and a handful of priests from across the Diocese.

The parish's longtime members and the late Msgr. Michael Coyne, the founding pastor who died Dec. 31, were recalled for their deep faith and dedication. Following the Mass, parishioners, clergy and religious sisters gathered at the nearby Carriage House for a gala.

Reflecting on Saint Paul's letters to the Corinthians, which teach about the diversity of spiritual gifts bestowed by God, Bishop Sullivan acknowledged the many ways parishioners have shared their unique talents to serve the parish and advance its mission of loving service, sacraments and charity.

"So many of the faithful have generously offered different gifts for the building up of this community of faith," Bishop Sullivan said. "Fifty years of varieties of ministries with services to countless persons. Fifty years of different works have been realized as each generation of parish-

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ioners has responded to the particular circumstances of their time."

Since its founding in 1975, the parish has flourished – growing in membership, expanding its faith-sharing spaces and enriching its service opportunities. Parishioners contribute across more than 15 ministries, from youth groups and the choir to meal distribution programs and visitations at nursing homes and hospitals. Over the decades, these acts of service and faith

reflect a community united by devotion and purpose, clergy said.

"We must acknowledge the late Monsignor Coyne for the strong foundation of this parish," said Father de la Peña. "He instilled the Catholic faith in the hearts and minds of the people. We treasure that legacy, and we must continue it."

Voices from the parish

"I get emotional when I think about this parish. It's so close to my heart," said Herb Kraker, 81, a founding parishioner whose

ties to the parish run deep.

Born in Yugoslavia, Kraker and his family were displaced during World War II, eventually finding refuge in a camp in Austria. At nine years old, the National Catholic Welfare Conference sponsored his family's relocation to the United States, where they settled on a farm in Lakewood, N.J. His family donated the church steeple when it was built in 1975.

"I wouldn't be here without the Catholic Church," he said.

For the Scalice family, the parish has been a cornerstone of their lives for four generations. Jennifer and Raymond, along with their children – James, 19; Alex, 17; Nicholas, 14; and Kaitlyn, 10 – are deeply involved in parish life.

"The family and community we've made here is so special," Jennifer Scalice said.

She added that the parish's history is especially personal for her, as she

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Photo by Crystal Herrera

Longtime parishioners pause to look at photo albums from the parish, and smile as they recognize themselves and their friends in the pictures.

National Seton shrine kicks off 50th anniversary of saint's canonization

By Kimberley Heatherington
OSV News

She was a wife. A mother. A teacher.

She was also – as the title of a new exhibit at the National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Md., tells visitors – “One of Us.”

And as the first native-born American saint, the 50th anniversary of Mother Seton's canonization will be celebrated with a full year of spiritually immersive activities. Celebrations began Jan. 4 with an EWTN-televised Mass celebrated by Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori at the pilgrimage destination bearing her name.

“In many ways, she was an ordinary woman who did ordinary things – things not unlike you and I do today,” said Rob Judge, executive director of the Seton Shrine. “She just did them through the lens of eternity, and God's grace and his providence – this strong belief that he would take care of her, and that he could be sought in this world and in the next.

“That permeated her entire life experience. But what also was relevant about her life experience,” Judge added, “is she was just trying to figure things out – like we are today.”

Born in New York City in 1774 to a prominent Episcopal family, Mother Seton experienced much loss and sorrow – the death of her mother, the bankruptcy of her husband's business, and his eventual death. But following her 1805 conversion to Catholicism, she also led a courageous and pioneer-



File photo / The National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton
The National Shrine of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Emmitsburg, Md., has kicked off its 50th anniversary celebration of the canonization of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton.

ing life – founding the first U.S. community for religious women, and planting the seeds of Catholic education in America.

On Sept. 14, 1975, St. Paul VI canonized Mother Seton in St. Peter's Square, declaring, “Elizabeth Ann Seton is a saint! ... St. Elizabeth Ann Seton is an American ... Elizabeth Ann Seton was wholly American! Rejoice for your glorious daughter. Be proud of her. And know how to preserve her fruitful heritage.”

Providing some context for the can-

onization, Judge said, “Take [yourself] back to the country in 1975. ... We had never had a native-born citizen here declared a saint. So when that finally happened, the Church in our country was just elated. ‘Finally, we have a saint!’ There's just this pride that one of us was recognized.”

That shouldn't, however, distance people from Mother Seton.

“We're all called to holiness – the universal call to holiness. ... We all have that opportunity,” said Judge. “The fact that she did this – and led a

very ordinary way responding to God's grace, as she encountered the hardships and the joys of life – we have that same opportunity. So in that sense, too, we can become a saint like she was.”

Visitors can tour the “One of Us” exhibit, which transports them to 1975 to tell the backstory of Mother Seton's canonization through artifacts, including the personal scrapbooks of those who attended the proceedings in Rome or watched them in Emmitsburg.

An original mural by artist Ellen Byrne of Frederick, Md., depicts Mother Seton's road to sainthood, while a separate installation shows other Americans in various stages of the canonization process.

Additional events during 2025 include an outreach program to the more than 200 U.S. parishes and schools under Mother Seton's patronage; a series of pilgrimage initiatives; a “50 for 50” digital content campaign showing the personal impact of Mother Seton and her shrine; expansion of the shrine's “Seeds of Hope” program offering retreats to those living in poverty; and – on Sept. 14 – a “Day of Joy” anniversary celebration to commemorate the day Mother Seton was canonized.

The shrine – which attracts more than 50,000 visitors each year, who can see the places Mother Seton lived and worked, as well as her tomb – will also operate its regular programs, tours and other activities throughout the year.

Absecon parish marks golden anniversary with Mass, gala

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received all her sacraments there and got married in the church. Her grandparents were founding parishioners, and her parents helped organize the gala. Now, their children represent the parish's future.

Alex and Nicholas served as altar servers during the Mass. For Alex, the parish shaped his sense of community and service. “I didn't really know what to do my second time as an altar server,” he said. “An older server showed me the way, and I learned a lot. Now, I try to help the younger boys.”

Glitter and gratitude

At the Carriage House, a banquet was in full effect, bathed in the glow of candlelight and the smooth swing of big band jazz. Parishioners, dressed in sparkling gowns and starched suits, shared stories and laughter, their voices blending with the clink of silverware.

In the entrance hall, photo albums were spread open, displaying decades of parish memories. Attendees paused

to reflect, smiling as they recognized themselves and friends in the photographs.

Sandy Leone, co-chair of the event planning committee and a parish member for more than 25 years, said that while the festivities took two years to organize, it was a labor of love.

“We wanted to help others appreciate all the work of our founders and community to get to this point. The most rewarding part has been sharing the vision of walking in discipleship and love to honor our parish's golden years and continue its mission for the future.”

Celebrations will continue throughout the year, with special events, fellowship gatherings, and spiritual series planned for the parish. In a tribute to the late founding pastor, it was also announced that Michigan Avenue, between White Horse Pike and New Jersey Avenue, would be renamed Monsignor Michael J. Coyne Way, honoring his lasting impact on the community.



Photo by Lori M. Nichols

Bishop Dennis Sullivan processes out of Mass underneath a sign celebrating the 50th anniversary of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, Absecon. At left is a photo of Msgr. Michael Coyne, founding pastor.