

#3 - The Catholic Church 2282 Route 6

Just beyond the post office but on the opposite side (balloons). Plenty of parking.



This beautiful new church overlooking Route 6 in South Wellfleet represents the latest chapter in the history of Our Lady of Lourdes parish. For most of the 20th century the Catholic community in Wellfleet worshiped in a remodeled one-room public schoolhouse near the center of town. The building was among the many neighborhood schools the town sold by auction; the money used to build a consolidated school in the center of town for the Wellfleet children in grades one through eight.

One of the schools, a small stucco building then located at the head of Duck Creek, was bid on successfully by a local member of the Catholic Church and became Our Lady of Lourdes Church. About five years later the building was moved to its current location at the center of town. Sacred Hearts missionaries, who came from

Belgium to serve the small parish, initially were not welcomed with open arms. However, when the ice froze over Long Pond, the missionaries' ice skating prowess won over the local young people and eased the acceptance of the priests by the townspeople.

The church's distinctive carved-wood doors were a relatively recent addition. When our nation was celebrating its 200th anniversary and local groups were asked to decide on a way to celebrate, Our Lady of Lourdes' pastor decided to replace the deteriorating school doors to improve its appearance on Main Street. New doors were carved by itinerant artists who, in return for their work, were permitted to camp on the church's backyard. Before that time, community attention was focused primarily on the church's parking lot across Main Street because parking became more important to local merchants. When the Diocese of Fall River put the church and its parking lot on the market, the town fathers were quick to respond to the local merchants' needs and bought the building and lot. No auction this time.

The church, building rectory, garage and parking area were sold to the town by Bishop Cronin of Fall River for \$550,000. Of course, it would have been convenient for the town to have been able to solicit government funding, but everyone knew how hard it would be to sell the old church building anyway – let alone with no parking area. And has proved to be so. Several committees of townspeople have served in the efforts to make wise decisions about new uses for the old building. Finally, the Town decided to sell the building to a citizen committee, which would concentrate on gathering grants and finding other sources of funds. An intimidating amount of money was needed to save the former church and change it into a wonderfully useful building for community activities and cultural events. Young Wellfleet citizens took on that gigantic task, and by this time next year the old schoolhouse will have lost all signs of its 100 year role as a church.

Meanwhile, Our Lady of Lourdes parish was trying to raise the

money for a new building near the center of town. It has banked the proceeds of the sale of the old church, and the diocese has lent the parish enough money to start this beautiful church building so this parish could worship in an appropriate site. The bishop of Fall River heard that a 10-acre building site was for sale out on Route 6 in South Wellfleet, where Peggy's Wool Shop had been located – some of us still remember that store - and he moved quickly to buy it. An architect, James Edward, was chosen and his designs were enthusiastically approved. Landscaping and parking were planned. The steeple arrived and began its reign over the new church. Bricks engraved with donors' names were laid in the Mary Garden, and parishioners celebrated the Mass of Dedication in the new building. Be sure to notice, beside the handsome spire, the turtle weather vane, a reminder of the parish's concern for nature.

The hand carved altar, brought from Belgium by the founding missionaries, graces the interior, thus keeping the connection between the old and new buildings. New stained glass windows, designed by The Plambusch Group, include a spectacular depiction, spanning the whole sidewall, of the appearance of the Virgin Mary to Portuguese children in Lourdes. The comfortable pews are installed in arcs facing the altar, and the new organ fills the spacious room with rich sound. Alas, the carved Crucifix that we had expected to see over the altar has yet to arrive from Italy because of the sculptor's death. A second room, almost as large as the sanctuary, serves as a functional hall for parishioners.