

**L**ay believers are in the front line of Church life; for them, the Church is the animating principle of human society. Therefore, they, in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness – not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church, that is to say, the community of the faithful on earth under the leadership of the Pope, the common Head, and of the bishops in communion with him. They are the Church.<sup>432</sup>

– Catechism of the Catholic Church  
The Profession of Faith, Chapter Three, Article 9

In his 40 years as a priest, Father Martin Morgan has formed an idea about how a parish should operate. Recently retired as pastor of St. Patrick Church in Sand Springs, he had the opportunity to know a couple whose lifetime of service to the parish was essential to its success. Nearly every parish, he says, has people like Bob and NaDean Garrett.

“Every parish has people whose energy and enthusiasm keep things going. When things get tough or things need to be done, they inspire others to move on,” he said.

A lifetime of service, both lay and ordained, began humbly some 59 years ago for Bob and NaDean. Bob was a graduate of Catholic schools in Purcell and Cushing, and just off a stint in the U.S. Navy, when he married NaDean in 1951. In 1952, his job took them to Vinita, where they attended Holy Ghost Parish. Bob was an electrical engineer and helped with minor maintenance around the church, but he remembers one reoccurring task in particular.

“Father (Joseph A.) Biegler would ring the bell every day for noon Mass, and when he let go of the rope, it would fall off. I had to climb up in the tower every afternoon and put it back,” Bob said.

# Making a parish thrive

For St. Patrick in Sand Springs, the Garretts are always there

Story and photography by  
Dave Crenshaw,  
Garrett family



NaDean joined the Church in 1954. While raising three boys took up a good bit of her time, she and Bob did what they could at Holy Ghost.

“Lay people couldn’t do that much back then,” NaDean said, so they sang in the choir and helped put on parish events. Bob installed air-conditioning systems and fire alarms in the convent and girls’ boarding school that were operating in Vinita at the time.

Another job change brought the family to Sand Springs in 1959. They immediately joined St. Patrick Parish and enrolled their children in the parish school that existed then. During the enrollment process, NaDean was asked if she would take responsibility for contacting other parents concerning school announcements.

“I was new in town and didn’t know anyone, but the sister told me that didn’t matter,” she said. “That was my first commitment to St. Patrick.”

Neither the parish nor the school had much money, and things needed to be done. But without the support and hard work of the people of the parish, those things wouldn’t happen. One particular annual event brought the value of service to light for Bob.

Every St. Patrick’s Day, parishioners would join together to cook and serve a turkey dinner to whomever showed up at the church. In those days before microwave ovens and instant mashed potatoes, the efforts of nearly everyone in the parish were required.

“It was quite an event,” said Bob. “We would typically serve about 700 people. The kitchen at the church was small, and everyone had to cook at home and bring in the food. It got so big that the health department made us stop.”

But it was the joint effort of the parish that impressed them both. The Garretts

and others in the parish were there to meet any new need that arose.

As they finished raising their sons, Bob finished his career with PSO in 1986. NaDean retired from her career as a certified ophthalmic technician in 1992. NaDean helped start the Altar Society and the RCIA program at St. Patrick. She has worked as the parish secretary and served on committees for spiritual formation, stewardship and ministry of consolation. She is an extraordinary minister, a reader and organizer of the church’s prayer tree. She sings in the choir and produces the parish newsletter. Bob helped redesign and build new office space when the school closed, and he performs electrical and mechanical maintenance when building codes allow. He was ordained a deacon in 1981

*“It takes a parish working together to make a parish thrive.”*

and assisted then-pastor Father Vincent McGouldrick in establishing Our Lady of the Lake Parish in Mannford in 1983. As NaDean served behind the scenes at St. Patrick, Bob would soon take a front-and-center role.

In the early 1990s, then-pastor Father Kenneth Fulton was diagnosed with Guillain-Barré syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes paralysis. As his condition worsened in 1993, he became progressively less able to attend to the duties of a parish priest. At about the same time, then-Bishop Eusebius Beltran was reassigned to the Archdiocese of Oklahoma City.

“Father (Bernard C.) Jewitt was Diocesan Administrator at the time. He called me to the chancery and said, ‘You’ll have



to run that parish for a while.”

For six years, Bob found priests for Mass, set church schedules, kept the books and did all the things that canon law allowed him to do. He even built a wheelchair ramp to the altar so Father Fulton could celebrate Mass when he was able.

The Garretts have served eight pastors over the years, and both have formally “retired” more than once from parish duties. Bob retired last year from the diaconate, but when Father Morgan retired in 2010, Father Paschal Mbagwu took over as administrator. “As I was giving Father Paschal a tour of the church. He told me I was going back to work. I guess you’d say I’m semi-retired now,” Bob said.

“I’ve retired four times,” added NaDean.

Although their list of duties isn’t nearly as long as it once was, the couple is still active and plans to continue to be. “We receive much more than we give,” NaDean said. “We’ll keep helping as long as we are able.”

The Garretts have been recognized several times for their service with certificates and parish dinners, but the parishioners of St. Patrick gave them their most cherished award in 1993, when the church took up a special collection for them to use to travel to Scotland.

“It’s been a real blessing to us,” NaDean added. “We haven’t done anything that someone couldn’t have done better. We were just available. It takes a parish working together to make a parish thrive.”

Father Morgan couldn’t agree more. He says that a priest, according to his own personal talents, only can do so much. It’s the parishioners, like the Garretts, working behind the scenes that make everything happen.

“Not having those kind of people in a parish would make the priest’s work extraordinarily difficult,” Father Morgan. “With them, it’s a joy.” ☕

