

Historical Stone Chapel offers a holy, spiritually enriching atmosphere

Brimming with history, the Stone Chapel at St. Francis de Sales, Abingdon, has welcomed worshipers since 1866. Once a mission of St. Ignatius in Hickory, this quaint and authentic stone structure served area Catholics for 98 years before St. Francis de Sales became a parish in 1964. In 1992, with more than 3,500 parishioners, St. Francis de Sales observed the community's 125th anniversary and opened the doors to a new house of worship.

While the new worship center proves to be more than adequate for weekend Masses and other larger events, the Stone Chapel remains a favorite gathering location for many parishioners. With nine pews on either side of the center aisle, it holds approximately 125 people, just large enough for a group service, yet intimate enough for those seeking time for spiritual meditation. Pal Gonzalez, a St. Francis de Sales parishioner of nine years, often attends daily Mass in the Stone Chapel. In addition to being a lector and volunteer in the parish office, Ms. Gonzalez maintains the parish archives. She, more than anyone, can appreciate the history and tradition that the Stone Chapel provides.

"I think it's a very prayerful chapel that's extremely well suited for quiet reflection," she said. "I've always been drawn to the sense of peace and history that the chapel provides. There's also something to be said about the spiritual atmosphere. It really is a very, very special place."

Many other parishioners agree. Open daily, the Stone Chapel offers morning weekday and weekend Masses. It's also available for weddings, funerals and retreats. On weekdays, numerous parishioners find time to stop by for some quiet and peaceful midday reflection.

As pastor, Father Charles M. Wible also embraces the vitality and uniqueness that the Stone Chapel brings to the St. Francis de Sales community.

“We’re proud that it’s a registered historical site,” he said. “It’s wonderful to have this kind of heritage on our property. It’s well worth maintaining because we see it as the anchor for the parish.”

Prominent and graceful on both the inside and outside, the chapel’s interior went through a series of stylish renovations in 2005. While the original historical integrity of the Stone Chapel remained unchanged, the interior now has more modern enhancements including new paint and enhanced lighting. All of the stained-glass windows were removed and cleaned. Painted above the altar is a beautiful dome ceiling with images of the sky and clouds. It’s certainly easy to see why countless parishioners find the chapel to be a quiet sanctuary for prayerful moments and peaceful contemplation. “I can’t think of a better place for a personal retreat,” said Ms. Gonzalez.

Father Wible and the St. Francis de Sales community welcome visitors. To learn more about the parish and the chapel, visit www.stfrancisabingdon.org.