

Inside and out, lake vacationers revel in Deep Creek Mass

McHENRY – Massgoers happily overflow St. Peter at the Lake Center.

Both sides of the nine-year-old building, a mile east of Deep Creek Lake, are lined with sliding glass doors followed by a row of benches. Beyond that is a pasture where people can unfold lawn chairs, and parents roam with antsy children.

Abundant sunshine and a cool breeze flow through the faithful, connecting even those inside with Garrett County's picturesque landscape.

Every visitor is greeted by Father C. Douglas Kenney, pastor of St. Peter the Apostle in Oakland, which together with the Lake Center he says is "one parish, two locations."

The center is not a church – it was not intended as such, nor was consecrated – but an outreach to the people vacationing at Deep Creek.

Year-round, the parish celebrates two Masses: 4 p.m. on Saturdays at the Lake Center, and 9 a.m. on Sunday at the main church of St. Peter. Summer, when an 11 a.m. Sunday Mass is added at the Lake Center, is the busiest time in Garrett County, Father Kenney said, but the parish continues to minister for those who visit for fall foliage, including the annual Autumn Glory festival Oct. 10-14, and then the ski slopes.

Most of the center's volunteers are retirees and man both weekend Masses during the summer. The majority have settled near the lake from elsewhere, including Maryland, West Virginia and the Pittsburgh area, such as Dolores Gloeckl.

Gloeckl, 91, stands at the back of the church with her tambourine, playing along to the upbeat guitar music with a smile. Most regulars know her as "The Tambourine Lady," but she is also the coordinator of the Lake Center's Masses.

She recalled when the parish held "Mass on the Grass" at the nearby Wisp Resort.

One Sunday, the bulletin listed a request for help preparing the Masses held near the lake. Gloeckl was happy to offer assistance.

"I put my name down and I tell you the next week," she said, "I look down at the bulletin and I saw my name on the front ... and I thought, 'Why is my name in the bulletin?'"

Next to her name, it read "coordinator."

For nearly 25 years, she's held the position, from Mass by the ski slopes, to a local Methodist Church, to the deck of the Honi-Honi Bar. Worship replaced wings and beer, as churchgoers docked their boats on the lake or parked cars across busy Route 219.

Gloeckl's van served as a traveling sacristy. The folded tables; large collection baskets, deep enough to keep the wind from catching the alms; lectionary; a bag holding bulletins and a thermos filled with wine; and a black suitcase carrying the hosts, a small crucifix and the cloths rendered her trunk out of order until fall.

Vacationers, as well as the church's mainstays, knew that they needed a more permanent building, but were adamant about maintaining the integrity of the Masses they had come to know and love.

"We promised them that if we got a building, it was going to be - as much as we could - the same way," Gloeckl said, adding that outside seating was part of the experience. "I think it satisfied most people."

Father Kenney, a Frostburg native, describes Deep Creek Lake as the Mid-Atlantic region's "best-kept secret." He said seasoned vacationers call the Lake Center, located on approximately 15 acres, "their parish away from home."

"There's something, to me, differently in celebrating there than in town," Father Kenney said of Oakland, not quite 14 miles from the Lake Center. "It's the light, the brightness, the openness."

B.J. and Krista Davisson are parishioners of St. Peter as well as St. John the Evangelist in Frederick. With houses in both locations, they feel part of both

communities.

When weather permits, the Davissons can be found with their Dalmatian, Cosmo, in lawn chairs. They loved the eccentric Masses at the Honi-Honi.

“That’s why we stuck to the outside,” B.J. said.

Depending upon the season, people come in shorts, Sunday best and ski gear.

“We try to make it a casual, ‘summer resort’ area type of feel,” Father Kenney said.

“We really try to be a welcoming community. I think we’ve done that.”

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org