

Dedication of Armed Forces Honor Garden at St. Paul's Set for July 4

If you're looking for a special way this 4th of July to pay homage to veterans as well as those who currently serve in our nation's military, you won't want to miss the dedication of the Armed Forces Honor Garden at St. Paul the Apostle Catholic Church in Horseshoe Bay.

The Honor Garden—under construction for the last three years—is now complete and the public is invited to attend its formal dedication July 4.

The special event will begin with Mass at 5:30 p.m. The dedication ceremony will take place at 6:15 p.m. at the Armed Forces Honor Garden, which is in front of the church. Following the dedication, there will be a reception and refreshments in the adjacent Linda Finn Family Life Center. St. Paul's campus is located atop Thanksgiving Mountain, at 201 Dalton Circle in Horseshoe Bay.

Along with its centerpiece statue of Jesus Christ embracing a soldier, the garden features a large fountain lined with blue tiles that are studded with brass stars bearing name-plate centers. The name plates memorialize donors' family members who have died in battle or those who are now deceased after serving in the military. A metal wall at the back of the garden contains memorial plaques honoring those who have served or who are still serving our country while paving stones in the garden's walkways pay tribute to the efforts of those who have contributed to the garden's development.

Adding to the garden's military theme, the fountain's base is inscribed with the words and musical score of "Taps." The garden also includes a peaceful upper area lined with stone benches and several of its walkways are inscribed with inspirational scripture passages.

Designed by landscape architects Studio | 16:19 of Round Rock and constructed by Westway Custom Builders of Horseshoe Bay, the \$230,000 cost of the garden was completely funded with donations from St. Paul's parishioners and numerous other members of the community.

The memorial Honor Garden was the idea of St. Paul's Pastor Fr. Ruben Patiño, C.S.P. who, as a teenager, was a member of the American Junior GI Forum in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Among Fr. Ruben's most poignant memories was being part of an honor guard that welcomed home fallen American soldiers as they arrived from Vietnam at the Corpus Christi airport. He accompanied the honor guard as they escorted the bodies to the fallen soldiers' families in the small rural towns of South Texas.

"I remember feeling quite honored to have been invited to join in," Fr. Ruben said. "I was especially moved by the gratitude of the families whose sons had given their lives for our country."

Years later, as a seminary student in Washington, D.C., he was reminded of his Honor Guard experience as he walked the path of the Vietnam War Memorial Wall. The thousands of names inscribed on that wall were overwhelming to him, especially when he realized that among them was the name of his step-brother Robert Patiño.

In 2014, a couple who had been married at St. Paul's donated to the parish a life-size statue of Jesus Christ embracing a soldier. Entitled "Lest We Forget," the statue inspired Fr. Ruben to begin developing the idea for what was to become the Armed Forces Honor Garden.

"The fight to preserve freedom and our American way of life at times calls on our loved ones in the military to go against their Christian values," Fr. Ruben said. "In some cases, they are required to take lives or witness the taking of lives. When they return home, among their primary needs are reconciliation and a sense of inner peace as bridges back to everyday life.

"I wanted to create a space dedicated to those needs. The statue provides the right message for such a space, one that inspires rebuilding a sense of forgiveness and inner peace," Fr. Ruben explained.

He added that the garden is designed to also be a place of remembrance that reminds all of us of the selfless sacrifice of those who serve. And it continues to offer opportunities for individuals to recognize family members and friends who have served or are currently serving.

Finally, it serves not only as a contemplative garden but also as a permanent display that honors the sacrifices of our true American heroes, Fr. Ruben said.

For more information on Armed Forces Honor Garden memorials and sponsorships, please call the St. Paul's parish office at 830-598-8342.

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