"Putting a smile on God's face"

Sacred Heart Radio celebrates 25 years of serving the Northwest

By Anna Weaver

In 2002, Rebecca Anderson was in her kitchen scrolling through the AM dial of her radio when she landed on a station broadcasting a Hail Mary prayer. It was "so Catholic" that she had to stop and listen.

What Anderson had come across was the daily rosary on 1050 AM, the home of Sacred Heart Radio. That chance tune-in intrigued her enough to become a regular listener, and eventually, it changed the way she approached her faith.

"When I started listening to Sacred Heart Radio, I was a cafeteria Catholic. I wasn't familiar with most of the traditions, devotionals and teachings of the faith," Anderson said. "The programming on Sacred Heart Radio helped to fill in the gaps I had about the faith while also connecting me to the Catholic community beyond our parish and archdiocese."

Anderson says that "the Blessed Mother threw me a Hail Mary to get me to the Sacred Heart of her son." A member of Holy Rosary Parish in Edmonds, she is now Sacred Heart Radio's outreach, sponsorship and promotion coordinator and co-host of "Life Talk NW" on the station.

FROM IDEA TO REALITY

Sacred Heart Radio celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2026, and Ron Belter, its president and general manager, says it began with an idea he threw out to a group at a 1999 retreat workshop.

"I was very frustrated by some of the anti-Catholic bigotry and stuff I was hearing on Christian radio stations," said Belter, a member of Holy Family Parish in Kirkland. "Basically, at a retreat, I raised my hand and said, 'Hey, if you want to start a Catholic radio station, do we have to talk to the bishop? Any suggestions?'"

It so happened that a representative for EWTN Global Catholic Television Network, which includes radio programming, was at the same workshop and pointed Belter in the right direction. From there, about 10 people began meeting to chart the future of local Catholic radio.

Sacred Heart Radio was incorporated that same year, starting with purchased airtime on KBLE-AM 1050 to broadcast the "Catholic Answers" program. When the station came up for sale in 2001, Sacred Heart Radio bought it, officially launching on Jan. 19, 2001.

Ron Belter, president and general manager of Sacred Heart Radio >

Courtesy Sacred Heart Radio

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Sister Colleen, standing, and Sister Marcia Kay of the Poor Clares of Spokane answer calls during a Sacred Heart Radio pledge drive. The station's Spokane studio is housed at the sisters' monastery.

Courtesy Sacred Heart Radio

Father Kurt Nagel hosts his morning show at the Sacred Heart Radio studios in Kirkland.

The listener-supported radio ministry has expanded over the last 25 years to include 12 stations in Seattle, Spokane, Shoreline, Olympia, Yakima, Lakewood/Tacoma, Grays Harbor and Kodiak, Alaska. (See box for the full list of stations.)

LOCAL IMPACT

Belter has heard stories from people whose lives were affected by Sacred Heart Radio, including three priests who say their vocation was influenced by it.

"We see the number of people that are coming through the OCIA programs, people that are having their marriages reconciled, people that are just walking on a closer journey with Christ and the Church," Belter said.

"The thing that commercial stations would just die for is to have our commitment of listenership," he added, pointing out that Sacred Heart Radio fans often spend a large share of their radio time on the station.

"I think we've been successful just because we've been faithful," Belter said. "We hope this is putting a smile on God's face."

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Twenty-five years later, one long-standing challenge remains: letting people know that Sacred Heart Radio exists.

"There are prayer groups, rosary groups and daily Massgoers that still do not know that there's a 24-hour Catholic radio station at their disposal, and that they can get it on their phone," Belter said.

"Part of raising awareness is just letting folks know that there's a wide variety of programming on the radio, whether it be news, devotionals, Mass, the rosary, the call-in shows, the retreat-style format shows … that there's something for everybody."

That diverse array of programming includes EWTN's daily Mass, popular shows like "Called to Communion," "Sound Insight with Dr. Tom Curran" and "Catholic Answers Live," plus other international, national and local programming.

New listeners also connected with Sacred Heart Radio during the COVID-19 pandemic, as people sheltered at home and were unable to attend their parishes.

"During COVID, it was not uncommon for us to get a phone call, and on the other end of the phone was someone crying because they would just say we saved their life because we became their parish, their friend, their companion, their consolation," Belter said. "And they had no one else to turn to."

"We were there 24/7 providing goodness, truth, beauty and hope in a really tough time for a lot of people."

Courtesy Sacred Heart Radio

Courtesy Sacred Heart Radio

Stephen Brashear

Above: Jim Anderson of LifeNews Radio, left, interviews Father Matthew Oakland at the Washington State March for Life in Olympia.

Top right: Pam Gunderson, left, Agnes Heidland, center, and Sister Miriam James Heidland recorded a series of shows called "Sisters in Christ" for Sacred Heart Radio.

Bottom right: The current staff of Sacred Heart Radio includes, from left, Rebecca Anderson, Gina Sciola, John Traynor, Ron Belter (seated), Bernadette Belter and Elizabeth Stoner.

A PACIFIC NORTHWEST GEM

Debbie Georgianni, the co-host of EWTN shows "Take Two" and "The Spirit World," has helped with Sacred Heart Radio's fundraising share-a-thons. She calls it a "beautiful little gem in the Pacific Northwest" and praises it for helping smaller regional EWTN affiliates.

"They are so willing to make sure that Washington state and beyond has a really solid, consistent message going out there of the Catholic voice, but in such a beautiful community way," Georgianni said.

While national and international programming is important to Sacred Heart Radio's content, Anderson also believes its local focus is key.

"At the core of it, we're real people here doing mission work and evangelizing where we live," she said. "We have people that call in, and we become part of their family."

"What God is allowing us to do here in the Pacific Northwest plays a vital role in evangelization," said Anderson. "And we may not see it that overtly, but we're still here 25 years later, right? So that's a testament. We don't take it for granted." Ω

WHERE TO LISTEN TO SACRED HEART RADIO

- 1050 AM – Seattle and King County
- 1240 AM / 104.7 FM – Olympia
- 100.3 FM – Shoreline
- 1180 AM / 107.3 FM – Lakewood/Tacoma
- 1450 AM / 103.5 FM – Grays Harbor County
- 970 AM / 106.1 FM – Spokane
- 88.1 FM – Yakima
- 88.3 FM – Kodiak, Alaska

Listen on the app:
sacredheartradio.org/gettheapp

SACRED HEART RADIO
25 YEARS PROCLAIMING CHRIST

YOU'RE INVITED!

25TH Anniversary Celebration

FEATURING
Father Wade Menezes
of the Fathers of Mercy

Oct. 17 | 6:15pm
Holy Family Parish, Kirkland
Tickets: $25
at sacredheartradio.org/shr25anniv