

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE SHRINE & GARDENS IN ENDEAVOR, WISCONSIN

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DEC. 12 IS SIGNIFICANT FOR SMALL GROUP OF HOPEFULS WITH BIG PLANS TO RESTORE ORIGINAL WISCONSIN SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

ENDEAVOR, Wis. (Dec. 4, 2020) – Each Dec. 12, the Catholic faithful celebrate the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, commemorating the 1531 appearance of Mary to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, on a hillside near Mexico City. While hundreds of years and thousands of miles separate that event and a small religious plot in Endeavor, Wis., there is, nonetheless, an important modern-day connection that is playing out as volunteers work tirelessly to save the little-known Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine, located at 409 Prairie Street. The untold story of the shrine, created in 1964 and the original shrine in Wisconsin to Our Lady of Guadalupe, is of two young Dominican Sisters with little formal art training who created the mosaic artwork as a way to build bonds with the migrant workers and their children. For more on the restoration efforts, log on to www.ourladyofguadalupewi.com.



The volunteer effort to save the shrine from the ravages of time is being led by Rev. Dale Grubba, a young 80 year-old and native of the area who was familiar with the shrine, church and adjoining casa meeting space from his younger days as a seminarian. “I would drive a school bus to pick up children of the migrant workers and take them to the casa to attend school taught by the Dominican Sisters,” he said. That was back in the late 1950s. When the church and shrine no longer served the community, the Diocese of Madison sold it in 2003 to a small group of friends and neighbors. When that community group no longer had a use for the property, they contacted Fr. Grubba, currently a pastor for parishes in Princeton and Neshkoro, Wis., to see if he would be interested in taking on the task of preserving it. He agreed, with the first order of business to pay the back taxes and assume the outstanding bills. That was in 2018.

“When I looked it over, I thought, ‘What have I gotten myself into,’ but for me it’s been a great thing, bringing new inspiration to my life and my work,” shared Fr. Grubba. The prophetic nature of the name of the Wisconsin burg where it’s located, Endeavor, wasn’t lost on Fr. Grubba either, who quickly understood this would be an endeavor of some magnitude.

He gathered a small group of enthusiastic admirers of the shrine and raised enough dollars to stabilize the shrine to prevent it from toppling over. Plus, thanks to some amateur sleuthing by the group that included use of Facebook, they were able to track down the two Dominican Sisters who spent the summer of 1964 creating the mural. Sister Joeann Daley lives in Shorewood, Wis., and Kathleen Broderick Stagny, who left the sisterhood, lives in Cleveland. Both are originally from Wisconsin and both studied art in college before teaching grade school. (The Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters are a teaching congregation whose motherhouse is in southwestern Wisconsin.) Both sisters celebrated 80th birthdays this year.

A Zoom call brought the group together virtually, minus Broderick who is communicating via text, to first reminisce and then review the ambitious plans for the restoration.

“It was Kathleen who drew the mosaic and she didn’t think it was that special at the time,” began Sister Joeann. “We worked with cement, plaster and grout and were just hoping the tiles would stick, as we really didn’t know much about creating a mosaic aside from a little background we got during one of our classes at Rosary College, now Dominican University, in River Forest, Ill., where we both graduated with art degrees.” Photo Credit Bob Schneider, Jr.



She went on to tell the story of how they sourced the mosaic pieces, describing remnants of fine Italian tile sourced from families whose children they taught at schools in Illinois to the everyday objects, with the latter being the more interesting story.

“The blues were from Noxzema jars and Milk of Magnesia bottles,” she said. “As for the other colors, Kathleen’s mother, who lived in nearby Wisconsin Dells, would make stops at bars to get beer and whiskey bottles and local souvenir shops for amber glass items, and she’d also haunt the local car graveyards for broken red taillights made of glass.” There was no careful cutting of the tiles and glass. “We put the glass in a bag and smashed it with hammers,” laughed Sister Joeann.

It was a messy undertaking, with the two sisters working in their white habits and veils from sun up until sun down, with both of them covered in plaster and dust by the end of the day. Anyone who stopped by, including the children of the migrant workers, were given a piece of glass to place in the mosaic, symbolizing they, too, had a hand in creating it.

When Sister Joeann learned a restoration was underway, she was flabbergasted. “We are the memory of what it felt like to make that shrine and I was amazed to be found after 56 years.”

After discussion, the group decided not to entirely modernize the mosaic, which measures 16 feet high by 13-and-a-half feet wide at the widest point at the base, but rather make sure it simply doesn’t deteriorate further.

Sister Joeann’s art practice today includes etchings and monoprints, and there’s talk among the group of having her create a small etching of the shrine, with prints to be sold as a fundraiser. So far, about 15% of the \$850,000 needed to complete the shrine restoration, develop surrounding gardens, add outdoor Stations of the Cross, and provide some much-needed attention to the church and casa has been raised from private donors. Fr. Grubba has plans for future phases too which may potentially include a shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes and an outdoor labyrinth. “We are, however, going to stay with the humble beginnings of this shrine and not turn this into a multi-million dollar undertaking,” noted Fr. Grubba. The hope is to finish in two years.

Fr. Grubba and his volunteer committee envision the faithful making pilgrimages to the site as part of an itinerary to visit other shrines in the state including the modern-day shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, and church services and weddings taking place from time to time. It will be open to people of all faiths. “While right now Endeavor may seem like a little town left behind, we are going to bring new life to it with this project,” said Fr. Grubba.

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Our Lady of Guadalupe Shrine & Gardens
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