

## CHURCH APPROVAL

God continues to reveal Himself to individuals “not indeed for the declaration of any new doctrine of faith, but for the direction of human acts.”

- St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*

In 2009, the most Reverend David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, opened a formal Church investigation into the Marian apparitions that occurred in 1859 on the site of the Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. While considered private revelation, the task of the commission was to review all the historical information on the apparitions, as well as the life of Adele, and test their consistency with Public Revelation as guarded by the Catholic Church. Based on the finding of this commission, on the feast day of the Immaculate Conception, 2010, Bishop Ricken gave official Church approval of the apparitions that occurred in Champion, Wisconsin (previously known as Robinsonville).



Photo Credit: Sam Lucero

In his decree, the Bishop stated, “I declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.”



## DIRECTIONS

The Chapel of Our Lady of Champion is located on County Hwy K, just 17 miles northeast of Green Bay, Wisconsin; 6 miles east of the intersection of State Hwy 57 and County Hwy K; and 1 mile east of the town of Champion, on the north side of the road.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF  
OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

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## THE STORY OF ADELE JOSEPH BRISE & OUR LADY OF CHAMPION



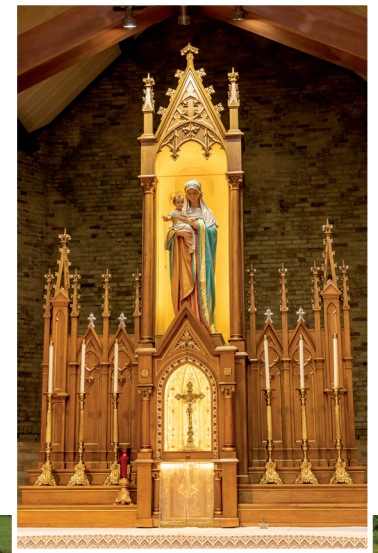
## THE SHRINE

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion is situated on twelve acres of peaceful farmland in northeastern Wisconsin. The site preserves the spot where the Queen of Heaven appeared to a young Belgian immigrant woman named Adele Brise in 1859.

The message of the Blessed Virgin to Adele was simple: Teach the Catholic Faith to the children of a people who were losing their faith through neglect. Adele took this message to heart, and for thirty-five years, dedicated her life to this mission. Today, the red brick school that Adele and her little community of women built in 1885 stands as a monument to their hard work.

The present Tudor Gothic church, with its vaulted ceiling and wooden truss construction, was built in 1942. The main altar of the church stands above the site of the Marian apparitions. Along with a lifelike statue of the Madonna and Child behind the altar, the stations in the church and religious statuary throughout the complex are beautifully sculpted and exhibit a style of devotional art reminiscent of the early 20th century.

In The Shrine's Apparition Oratory, just below the Church, a statue of Our Lady of Grace stands, surrounded by devotional candles and flowers, near the spot where the remains of the two trees that the Blessed Mother stood between were found. Just outside the Oratory entrance is the little cemetery where Adele and her associate, Maggie Allard, are buried.



## ADELE JOSEPH BRISE

The 1850s were a time of great immigration to Wisconsin. Statehood had just been declared in 1848, and the price of land was very affordable. Among the Belgian immigrants of 1855 was a family from the province of Brabant whose daughter Adele, born on January 30, 1831, was to have a very significant impact on the spiritual welfare and education of the newly formed communities of northeastern Wisconsin.

Despite the loss of an eye as a young child and a meager education, Adele was known for her charming and inviting personality, fervent piety, simple religious ways, and confidence in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin. In 1855, Adele left her native Belgium, where she had hoped to enter an Ursuline convent, and settled on the Green Bay peninsula with her family. Four years later, in October of 1859, Adele would receive a mission from the Holy Mother of God through a series of apparitions.

Based on the account told by several sources who worked with Adele personally, Adele first saw a lady all in white standing between two trees while possibly on her way to the grist mill. Adele was frightened and stood still. The vision slowly disappeared, leaving a white cloud.

The following Sunday, October 9th, while on her way to Mass in the company of her sister Isabel and a neighbor woman, the lady in white once again appeared to Adele between the same set of trees. After Mass, Adele related her experience to her confessor who said that if it were a heavenly messenger, she would see it again, and it would not harm her. He also counseled her to ask in God's name who it was and what it desired of her.

On her way home from Mass with two companions, Adele saw Our Lady for a third time. The third apparition is described:

*As they approached the hallowed spot, Adele could see the beautiful lady, clothed in dazzling white, with a yellow sash around her waist. She had a crown of stars around her head. Adele fell on her knees, saying, 'In God's name, who are you, and what do you want of me?'*

*"I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same. You received Holy Communion this morning and that is well. But you must do more. Make a general confession and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners. If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them."*

*"Adele, who is it?" said one of the women. "Oh, why can't we see her as you do?" said another weeping. "Kneel," said Adele, "the Lady says she is the Queen of Heaven." Our Blessed Lady looked kindly at them, saying, "Blessed are they that believe without seeing."*

*Then Our Lady asked Adele, "What are you doing here in idleness while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?"*

*"What more can I do, dear Lady?" asked Adele weeping.*

*"Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation."*

*"But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?" Adele said.*

*"Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing, I will help you."*

*Our Lady lifted her hands as though she were beseeching a blessing for those at her feet. Slowly she vanished from sight leaving Adele overwhelmed and prostrate on the ground, and the dense woods as solemn as before.*

When Adele got up, she immediately went about fulfilling this mission.

## ADELE AND HER MISSION

While the population of Wisconsin was rapidly growing throughout the 1840s and 50s, the Church had been unable to keep up with the growing need for pastors. When the Brise family came to Green Bay in 1855, the nearest church was located in Bay Settlement, eleven miles away, and there was only one pastor to serve the entire northeastern part of the state. As a result, people, and especially children, were not able to receive proper religious instruction. The situation was ripe for the spread of heresy, and the Faith was becoming distorted and lost among a large majority of the Catholic community. These circumstances created a very great need for the mission that Adele had received from Our Blessed Mother.

With her characteristic confidence in the intercessory power of the Blessed Virgin, Adele began catechizing the children and admonishing sinners. Teaching from house to house, up and down the Green Bay Peninsula, she would travel as much as 50 miles on foot. Weather conditions, fatigue, lack of education, dangers of the forest and ridicule did not discourage Adele or hinder her determination to fulfill her duty to the Blessed Mother's request.

Eventually, she was joined by several young women from the area, and St. Mary's Boarding Academy was founded near the site of the apparitions, located next to the chapel dedicated to Notre Dame de Bon Secours (Our Lady of Champion). Later, with assistance from the people of the Belgian community, Adele built a school, chapel and convent in 1885 on donated land in the town of Robinsonville. It is important to note that later, at the suggestion of Adele, Robinsonville changed its name to Champion, the name of the town in Belgium where Adele had originally planned to join the Ursuline order with her friends.

Over the years, while Adele and her religious community suffered trials, persecutions and set-backs, they were also the means through which miraculous events and healings were manifest. One of the most

spectacular of these events occurred in 1871, when the Chapel grounds and buildings were left virtually untouched by the merciless fury and devastation of what has come to be known as the Great Peshtigo Fire. As the fire approached, local residents, some with animals in tow, gathered in earnest prayer with Adele and her companions, which was answered with a fire-quenching rain in the early hours of October 9, exactly 12 years after the Queen of Heaven appeared to Adele. Father Peter Pernin, a local priest at that time, described the grounds where the miraculous event occurred as an "emerald isle in a sea of ashes."

Adele and her community continued to teach and catechize the children for many more years. Their presence had a lasting effect on the people of the community. Adele lived out her ministry with a zeal and love of God and Mary until her death on July 5, 1896. In October of 1902, Bishop Messmer entrusted the work at the Chapel to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross (Bay Settlement). Sister Pauline LaPlante, O.S.F. was assigned to the Chapel and remained as its head for the next 24 years.

Since then, the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion continues to be the source of many graces and healings, both spiritual and physical, reminding us always of our Blessed Mother's words to Adele....

**“GO AND FEAR NOTHING,  
I WILL HELP YOU.”**

