



"I am the Queen of Heaven."

IMAGES OF MARY

Images of the Blessed Mother grace many places at her ShrineP3

PESHTIGO FIRE

The Shrine survived a night of firestorms in October 1871 — the night of The Great Chicago Fire.....P6

FIRST SOLEMNITY MASS

Over 3,500 attended the first Solemnity October 9, 2023 in Champion P10

APPARITION CHAPEL UPDATES

Renovations with new altar being blessed P11



Rector and chaplains are members of the Fathers of Mercy Apostolate

BY TENA KLESSIG | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION — June 18, 2022, began a new chapter of ministry for Father of Mercy Joseph Aytona, when he was appointed as the new rector of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.

Fr. Joseph had previously served as director of missions for the Fathers of Mercy Apostolate, based in Auburn, Ky. His predecessor as rector, Fr. John Broussard, was transferred to the



FR. JOSEPH AYTONA, CPM

Kentucky Generalate to take over Fr. Joseph's previous role.

In 2003, Fr. Joseph joined the Fathers of Mercy and was ordained to the priesthood in May 2010. He is a 2010 graduate of Holy Apostles College and Seminary in Cromwell, Conn., where he earned a bachelor of arts degree

in philosophy, a master of divinity degree and a master of arts degree in theology.

Fr. Joseph's younger brother, Fr. Jewel Aytona, served at the Shrine twice as chaplain and is now in mis-

sionary work for his congregation. The two brothers are originally from the Los Angeles area.

Fr. Joseph said he enjoys his role as rector.

"The cultural diversity is very apparent when you look at the pilgrims that come and how far they have traveled to visit here," he said. "It shows the universal nature of the Catholic Church, and the love people have for the Blessed Virgin Mary."

He is also impressed with the faith of the visitors to the Shrine.

"If you want to be healed — as a lot of people come here (are) looking for a healing — the best way to foster spiritual healing is to go to confession, then receive Holy Communion," he said. "There is no better prayer for healing than those two sacraments together. The Shrine is the perfect place for this."

As director of missions for his community, Fr. Joseph was responsible for appointing priests for missionary work and parish assignments all around the United States, including assigning missionaries to parishes or places like the Shrine. Prior to being missions director, he served as director of vocations for five years with the Fathers of Mercy. He has appeared on

"EWTN Live" and "Life on the Rock" Catholic TV programs.

Fr. Joseph is also the founder of two apostolates. The Spiritual Motherhood Sodality (SMS) encourages women to spiritually adopt an individual priest. In imitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who prayed for Jesus, the women of the SMS pray daily for the priests they have adopted. The second apostolate, Family Vocation Ministries, seeks to promote vocations to the priesthood and religious life through the sanctification of families. Fr. Joseph said it was created to help parents foster the call of their children to whatever vocation they may have and teaches them how to "plant seeds of holiness."

He has also worked in production, finances and inventory control for media, such as books, CDs and DVDs. He has a podcast, which can be found at fathersofmercy.com/team-members/fr-joseph-aytona/.

When his brother, Fr. Jewel, was chaplain at the Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, Fr. Joseph visited him, so he was familiar with the Shrine when he arrived.

Today, Fr. Joseph said he hopes that when pilgrims come to the Shrine they take away "forgiveness of their sins and union with Christ in the Holy

Eucharist."

Of the new solemnity of Our Lady of Champion, Fr. Joseph said he believes the annual Mass planned each Oct. 9 at the Shrine will offer "more opportunities to evangelize the Gospel through the message of Our Lady of Champion."

Also serving with Fr. Joseph at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion are Fr. Michael French and Fr. Thomas Reagan, who are both chaplains.

Fr. Michael French was ordained in June 2022 after attending Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was born and raised in Columbus, Ohio. He graduated from Ohio State University in 2008 and worked in the aerospace industry for seven years in Florida. He entered the Fathers of Mercy congregation in 2015.

Fr. Thomas Reagan grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and Cincinnati, the oldest of three children. Upon graduating from Purdue University, he worked for IBM as an engineer and as a project manager. He received his master's degree in theology from Franciscan University of Steubenville. Fr. Thomas was ordained to the priesthood for the Fathers of Mercy in 2016.



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Mary’s images grace many sites around her Shrine



ON MISSION FILE PHOTOS

Four images of Mary are among the artwork at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. From left are the official statue of Our Lady of Champion, a stained-glass window of Adele and the apparition, the Our Lady of Grace statue and the retired processional statue of Mary that dates to 1908.

Some of the statues are more than a century old

BY PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

CHAMPION — When you visit The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, you’ll notice many statues and images of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Several have historical significance to the Shrine.

One of the most recent is the stained-glass window of the apparition to Adele in the Mother of Mercy Hall. This full-size window was placed in the hall (dedicated in 2019) in 2020. There is also a matching window of St. Joseph on the same wall.

The words on the window of the apparition are: “Go and fear nothing. I will help you.” They are part of the message Adele received from the Blessed Mother. Adele is depicted wearing the modified habit of the lay community she later

founded.

Also on the grounds are:

- The statue in the Apparition Chapel of Mary holding the Child Jesus is first seen when entering the chapel. This image of Mary is traditionally known as “the Queen of Heaven.”

This particular statue dates to 1942, when the present chapel was built. Set above the chapel sanctuary, it was donated by local people under the direction of Fr. Rudolph Hodik, then pastor of Holy Trinity Parish in Casco. It was restored in 2020 by Conrad Schmitt Studios in New Berlin, Wis.

The statue was made in 1936 at DaPrato Statuary (now Daprato Rigali Studios) in Chicago. The Queen of Heaven image was chosen because, when Adele Brise saw the apparition of Mary in 1859, the Blessed Mother identified herself as “the Queen of Heaven (Regina Coeli).” There are a few statues like it around the country — though not many. The molds and designs for this particular statue were destroyed in a 1968 fire at the Chicago studio.

When the Shrine’s statue underwent restoration in 2020, the staff at Conrad Schmitt took it to a nearby meteorology company with a calibration laboratory and 3D scanners. Don Warden, chief operations officer at the Shrine, said that, after a four-hour process, they completed a scan of the statue. It has been used to make molds for replica statues that are now sold at the Shrine’s gift shop.

- The official statue of Our Lady of Champion was dedicated on April 12, 2013, by Bishop David Ricken who commissioned Gianfranco Tassara of Milwaukee to design a statue following the description of Adele Brise’s vision. The blonde-haired image is attired in white with a gold sash. The statue is currently located in the Mother of Mercy Hall.
- The statue in the Apparition Oratory is often photographed at the Shrine. Depicting Mary’s image as Our Lady of Grace, the statue came from France in August of 1907. It was donated by Fr. Philip Crud, pastor at St. Joseph Parish

in Champion, who had been appointed to serve the local Belgian community in 1865.

Fr. Crud had directed Adele Brise to gather women to assist in her teaching mission. This statue is directly under the Queen of Heaven statue in the Apparition Chapel. It stands near, if not over, the reported site where Mary appeared to Adele Brise in October of 1859.

- The now-retired processional statue of Mary is displayed in the Mother of Mercy Hall. This three-foot-high statue wears a crown and holds a scepter. Her white gown is stitched with silver thread and metal beads, forming a heart in the gown’s center. While the current statue is over a century old, it is not the original processional statue used by Adele Brise. That statue was irreparably damaged by fire started by a candle during a procession.

The retired second processional statue came to the Shrine in 1908, long after Adele Brise’s death on July 5, 1896. The statue wears a wig of human hair which diocesan

archival records show was made in 1953. The hair was donated by Sr. Regina Le Mere, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross who died in 2018 at the age of 90.

The statue was retired in 2019, the 160th anniversary of the apparition.

- Starting with the 2020 Assumption procession, a statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary has been used. That statue currently stands in the sanctuary of the chapel in the Mother of Mercy Hall.

Belgian Fact

The first Belgian settlement was only 10 miles northeast of Green Bay and named “Aux Premiers Belge” – translated to “the First Belgians.”

Source: The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion

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and the faithful of the

Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin

Are you a witness Adele's holiness and heroic virtue?

BY SHRINE STAFF | FOR ON MISSION

"Is the Cause for Canonization open yet for Adele Brise?" This is a question asked often at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion by visiting pilgrims.

The answer to the question is: "No, not yet." However, this process is being discerned, and there are several steps that need to be completed before a Cause can be opened.

One of those steps is the drafting of the *Libellus*, which means "little book." It is the document that is presented to the bishop as a petition to open the Cause.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Father and son pray at the grave of Adele Brise, located at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion

This *Libellus* includes a short biography, writings or dictations, and a witness or testimonies to the life of the person of interest.

If opened, this Cause for Adele would be considered an Ancient Cause because of the amount of time that has elapsed since her death in 1896. This makes the collection of witnesses and testimonies a bit more challenging, as there is no one alive who had direct contact with Adele.

In this situation, witnesses for the Cause would likely fall into one or more of the following categories:

- Descendants of Adele's siblings or descendants of those who knew Adele, whose stories of Adele and her mission would have been passed down through each generation.

- Those who have received particular graces through the intercession of Adele, or those who have heard of family members, friends or others who have received particular graces through the intercession of Adele.

- Those who have extensively researched the life of Adele and the history of the Shrine itself.

A CALL FOR WITNESSES

If you or someone you know falls into one of these categories, we ask that you pray about sharing your witness or testimony of Adele. This is a critical component needed to open the cause!

For those who discern to come forward, we ask that you simply send a letter via email or postal mail with your name, contact information and a brief summary of your witness or testimony to Adele's holiness and life of heroic virtue.

As we assemble the list of witnesses (we will need about 12), we may reach out to you if we need to clarify your information. If the Cause for Adele were to be opened, you would also be interviewed by the postulator for the Cause, who is responsible for the overall process.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Adele Brise pictured above.

We ask for Adele's intercession in bringing forth witnesses of her life – that her story may reach more souls and that her witness to Christ may bring consolation to those in need.

HOW TO SUBMIT

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Adele Brise pictured sitting in center, surrounded by students she taught alongside her companions.

THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO



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Shrine escaped devastation of Peshtigo Fire

October 1871 saw an inferno that burned 2,400 square miles of land, killing at least 1,500 people

BY PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

PESHTIGO — Each autumn, images of fiery leaves pair with memories of the Peshtigo Fire. It happened on the night of Oct. 8, 1871, 152 years ago. The same storm system that fueled the Great Chicago Fire also spawned the Peshtigo Fire.

This series of blazes, firestorms and fire tornadoes in northeast Wisconsin spread over and destroyed 2,400 square miles — roughly the size of the state of Delaware — and killed 1,500 to 2,500 people.

This year, The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, as it does each year, will again mark the anniversary of this tragedy with prayer and remembrance. The Shrine and its founder, Adele Brise, played a role in the story of that fiery night.

Adele had founded what was then known as “The Chapel” (*“La Chapelle”*) at Robinsonville (now The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion). She and Fr. Peter Pernin, a Canadian missionary priest serving as pastor at St. Mary in Peshtigo and Our Lady of Lourdes in Marinette, both lived through that night of fire.

Every year, the Shrine hosts an anniversary rosary and prayer event all night from Oct. 8 to the morning of Oct. 9. Today it is known as the “Victory Over the Fire All Night Rosary.”

The commemoration begins at 7 p.m. with a remembrance service and continues with a candlelight procession around the outdoor rosary walk, all-night Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and rosaries prayed every hour. Joining participants are descendants of families who lived through that October night.

The first celebration of the Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Champion was celebrated by Bishop David Ricken on Oct. 9, 2023. (See story on page 10A.)

While Adele did not write about the fire experience, Fr. Pernin did. In a book titled “The Finger of God Was There!” he wrote about his own experiences. He later visited The Chapel and spoke with “Sr. Adele,” as she was known to people in the area, to compare with and record what she lived through.

While The Chapel, where many gathered to pray that night, was spared from the flames, Peshtigo was not. Fr. Pernin’s church of St. Mary, as well as the rest of the town, were destroyed. Marinette and its neighbor city, Menominee, Mich., were also extensively damaged, as was Fr. Pernin’s Our Lady of Lourdes Church in Marinette, where many survivors were evacuated.

DRY SUMMER

Fires had been burning in the area around and north of Green Bay for months. Drought conditions that summer had dried creeks and marshes. The then-flourishing lumber industry had also left the region strewn with huge amounts of tree debris and branches — called “slash.” Peshtigo was a city quite literally built on sawdust.

Sr. Pius Doyle, one of the founders of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy



PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

A mural inside the Peshtigo Fire Museum depicts the night of Oct. 8, 1871, when people fled to the Peshtigo River to try to escape the fire that killed at least 1,500 people.

Cross, recorded events of late summer and fall 1871. In her journal, she noted how immigrant farmers were also clearing surrounding timberland for fields. Smaller prairie fires sometimes resulted.

“Early in August, in the afternoon,” Sr. Pius wrote, “the sun would be obscured, owing to the fire which steadily worsened so that, towards the end of the month, it was becoming frightful.”

Nothing, though, can describe the horror of the firestorm on Oct. 8 — including fire whirlwinds that witnesses described as sounding like freight trains. Historical records say that the fire was so intense that it had the power of a thermonuclear bomb and temperatures so high that people were cremated as they fled.

On Oct. 11, 1871, the Marinette and Peshtigo Eagle newspaper reported what happened to some that night: “Crowds pushed for the bridge, but the bridge, like all else, was receiving its baptism of fire. Hundreds crowded into the river, cattle plunged in with them, and being huddled together in the general confusion of the moment, many who had taken to the water to avoid the flames were drowned. A great many were on the blazing bridge when it fell.”

At the Peshtigo church on Oct. 8, Fr. Pernin dug a trench in his garden and buried his books and “church ornaments” in it and covered them with sand.

FR. PERNIN WENT FOR THE TABERNACLE

He then returned for the tabernacle, which was in his house because the church building was to undergo interior painting that upcoming week. Since he couldn’t get his key in the lock, he grabbed the entire tabernacle and put it in his wagon.

Going back for the chalice, he noted “a strange and startling phenomenon met my view. It was that of a cloud of sparks that blazed up here and there with a sharp detonating sound like that of powder exploding and flew from room to room. I understood then that the air was saturated with some special gas, and I could not help thinking if this gas lighted up from mere contact with a breath of hot wind, what would it be when fire would come in actual contact with it.”

Fr. Pernin managed to save the tabernacle, dragging his wagon to the Peshtigo River. In the jostle and bedlam, the wagon was pushed into the water and the tabernacle floated away. The next day, it was found, resting upright and dry, on a log in the river — with the sacred species safe inside. Today, the tabernacle spends part of the year

at St. Mary Church in Peshtigo and the summer at the Peshtigo Fire Museum, at 400 Oconto Ave. It is open from Memorial Day to Oct. 8.

IN THE RIVER

Fr. Pernin described the river scene that night: “When turning my gaze from the river, I chanced to look either to the right or left, before me or upwards, I saw nothing but flames; houses, trees, and the air itself were on fire. Above my head, as far as the eye could reach into space, alas! too brilliantly lighted, I saw nothing but immense volumes of flames covering the firmament, rolling one over the other with stormy violence as we see masses of clouds driven wildly hither and thither by the fierce power of the tempest.”

Nearly 10 miles away, in Marinette, as recorded in a special edition on Oct. 9, 1871, the Eagle newspaper reported the night scene: “At this time the direction of the wind changed rapidly

PESHTIGO | P19



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Peshtigo Church Tabernacle

Adele Brise: A woman devoted to the Eucharist

BY FR. EDWARD LOONEY | SPECIAL TO ON MISSION

GREEN BAY — The years since 2020 have been a difficult time for Catholics. The COVID-19 outbreak forced the suspension of public liturgies all throughout the world. Daily and Sunday Mass-goers no longer could receive the Eucharist. Spiritual communions became a way of life Sunday after Sunday, creating a longing within believers for the day they could once again be united with their Eucharistic Lord.

In some ways, this mirrors the 19th-century experiences of Belgian immigrants settling in northeast Wisconsin who began to abandon their faith and its sacramental practices. One priest wrote to the church in Belgium, asking for them to send accompanying priests with their flock who were emigrating to the United States.

This sacramental scene may be one of the contributing factors as to why the Queen of Heaven chose to appear to Adele Brise in 1859 — to renew the faithfulness of the people.

On Oct. 9, 1859, Adele was on her way to morning Mass, accompanied by her sister and a friend, when, for the second time, she saw a beautiful woman between two trees along the path. (Walking along the wooded trail, several miles each way for the privileged holy encounter, demonstrates Adele’s devotion to the Mass and the Eucharist.)

After attending Mass, Adele went to the priest and asked him for advice about the mysterious woman. He told her to ask a simple question and that is what she did on the way home.

From Our Lady’s message to Adele, we learn that she received Holy Communion on that Sunday because Mary commended her reception: “You received Holy Communion this morning and that is well.” But the Blessed Mother unlocked for us a secret about our re-

“But you must do more, make a general confession and offer your Communion for the conversion of sinners.”

ception of Holy Communion, allowing Adele, and now us, to deepen our Eucharistic devotion.

The message went on: “But you must do more, make a general confession and offer your Communion for the conversion of sinners.”

Since Adele responded to the mission Our Lady entrusted to her of gathering the children and teaching, we can safely believe that she took seriously the invitation to prayer and offering her Communion for the conversion of sinners.

When returning to the pew after receiving Holy Communion, what do you do? Maybe you join in singing the hymn or pause for a few moments in silent prayer, having a heart-to-heart conversation with our Savior about our fears and hopes.

It is a powerful moment of prayer, and Our Lady asks us to pray for the conversion of sinners, which begins with ourselves, our family and friends, and the rest of the world.

The next time you receive the Eucharist, fulfill Our Lady’s request and pray for the conversion of sinners. You can pray with your own words or use the prayer I wrote (seen at right) to teach people how to pray in this way.

Adele attended Mass and received Holy Communion. After the apparition, she offered her Holy Communion for the conversion of sinners and prepared children to receive their first Holy Communion in response to Our Lady’s request to “teach the children how to approach the sacraments.”

The next time you approach to receive the Eucharist, remember the words Mary spoke to Adele and use them to deepen your Eucharistic devotion and prayer.

Fr. Looney’s writings, prayers and devotions to the Champion apparition can be found in his book “Our Lady of Good Help: Prayer Book for Pilgrims,” available from tanbooks.com and the Shrine gift shop.

‘Prayer after Communion for the conversion of sinners’

BY FR. EDWARD LOONEY | SPECIAL TO ON MISSION

Eternal Father, I kneel before you this day with a grateful heart because you have allowed me to receive the Body and Blood of your Son Jesus in Holy Communion.

Thank you for sending the Queen of Heaven to earth with a message calling us to conversion and emphasizing the sacraments. For when she appeared to Adele Brise in 1859, she asked her to offer her Holy Communion for the conversion of sinners. Just as Adele did long ago, I wish to do likewise this day.

I offer to you, Eternal Father, the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of your Son, for the conversion of sinners, including my own conversion, in reparation for sin, and the salvation of souls. Through Our Lady’s maternal solicitude, may the hearts of hardened sinners return to the sacraments of penance and Eucharist, especially to Sunday Mass and to daily prayer.

As I go forward from this holy Mass, help me to fear nothing, knowing that you are with me and are always guiding me and that Our Lady constantly intercedes for me. Make me aware of your presence this day and always. Amen.

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Franciscan roots run deep at the Shrine

Shrine's founders began the Franciscan way of life tradition

BY CORRIE CAMPBELL | SPECIAL TO ON MISSION

CHAMPION — At the entrance to the Rosary Walk at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion stands the St. Francis of Assisi Grotto. Its ties to where the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared nearly 165 years ago run deep.

In 1859, Adele Brise reported visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the Shrine grounds. At the Blessed Mother's urging, Adele dedicated her life to the care of souls and serving the religious needs of those who settled in the area.

Adele traveled on foot within a 50-mile radius of the Shrine to teach children what they needed to know for their salvation and to teach them the Sign of the Cross, as Mary had instructed.

While she was not part of any formal religious community, Adele lived a holy and sanctified life — much like a member of a Third Order community, a group of laypeople committed to the rule of life of a particular religious order.

'SISTERS OF GOOD HELP'

It is believed that Adele and the women, often called the "Sisters of Good Help" (whom Adele called "Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi"), followed a Franciscan way of life.

As tertiaries, these women would have made a life commitment to become members of what is now called the Secular Franciscan Order ("secular" meaning "embedded in the world"). There are now more than 15,000 Secular Franciscans in the United States and about 400,000 around the world.

Though Adele's specific group disbanded after her death in 1896, the Third Order of Secular Franciscans is still well established in Green Bay as St. Ann's Fraternity under the La Verna Regional Fraternity of Secular Franciscans and meet monthly.

RULE OF LIFE

Their rule of life is "to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people."

Also prominent in the group's rule is a devotion to the Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, who "was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family."

"The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently," states the group's rule.

There is often confusion about Adele Brise being a member of a recognized religious order.



ARCHIVE PHOTO COURTESY OF SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS OF THE HOLY CROSS

In this undated photo, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross sells religious articles at an outdoor stand at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. The community oversaw the Shrine area from 1902 to 1992.

NOT A FORMAL RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

That is rooted in the fact that many have often referred to her as "Sr. Adele." She did wear a modified habit she had designed, and lived a holy life, as did those who served with her in their particular form of Franciscan life. However, she was not a formal member of a religious order.

Some of the confusion about Adele might also be rooted in the fact that, to help carry out Adele's mission, there was a religious order of sisters who took over the care of the Shrine, which Adele had called "Our Lady of Good Help," which then became known as "The Chapel at Robinsonville."

At the urging of then Green Bay Bishop Sebastian Messmer in 1902, the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross in Bay Settlement continued Adele's teaching legacy on the Shrine grounds, first continuing Adele's boarding school, then operating a home for orphaned children with disabilities (1933), then a pre-novitiate high school for women entering their community (1953) and, finally, in 1971, a house of prayer and retreat center.

Belgian Fact

Adele's father built the first chapel near the apparition site. It was only 10 feet by 12 feet.

Source: The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion



COURTESY OF DIOCESAN ARCHIVES | FOR ON MISSION

Adele Brise, seated at right, is pictured with two of her early companions at what became The National Shrine.

Groups associated with the Shrine

Here is a summary of the religious and other orders associated with The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion throughout its nearly 165-year history:

- 1869-1902: After the apparition, Adele Brise formed a secular community which she called "The Sisters of Good Help," who followed a lay Franciscan way of life. Adele and those who worked with her in the mission dressed in a modified habit that Adele had devised.
- 1902-1992: Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross in Bay Settlement.
- 1992-2002: Carmelite Sisters of Grand Rapids, Mich.
- 2002-2011: Diocese of Green Bay operates Shrine.
- 2011-present: Fathers of Mercy operate Shrine, administering sacraments and offering spiritual direction. Assistance and support in catechesis is offered by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity in Manitowoc.
- There are also two layperson orders that currently offer assistance: the Knights of Columbus Honor Guard and the Knights, Dames and Auxiliary members of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, the oldest lay religious order in the Catholic Church.

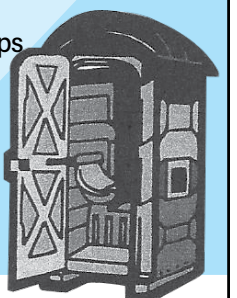
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An opportunity to visit with the saints

From the 12 Apostles to the Divine Mercy saint, saints’ relics offer another focus for prayer

BY PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

CHAMPION — If you’d like to see relics of saints and even the life of Christ, a visit to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion might be in order. In the Apparition Oratory, you will find a large display case of relics of saints. These include relics of the 12 Apostles, who walked with Jesus when he ministered on earth.

The Shrine’s permanent collection of relics also includes relics of SS. Cecilia, Pius X, Anastasia, Faustine Kowalska, Teresa of Kolkata and Teresa of Avila, as well as a relic of St. Lucy that is in the process of being authenticated and thus not displayed.

Father of Mercy, John Broussard, former rector at the Shrine, said that, over the years, the Shrine has received donations of relics. These include relics of St. Teresa of Kolkata and St. Faustina Kowalska.

The number, though, increased in one jump with the addition of the 12 Apostles.

“Suddenly,” said Fr. Broussard, “I had a priest come forward with a bunch of relics that he wanted to donate to the Shrine. He provided all the paperwork with them when he donated them.”

That priest donated the relics of the 12 Apostles several years ago, along with relics of the four evangelists: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

“So, after some research and making sure they were authentic, we decided that it would be great to display all of them,” Fr. Broussard said. “When we renovated the downstairs oratory, we decided to include a relic case, a giant sort of reliquary case, where we could put them all.”

The Oratory Chapel’s display also contains relics from the roots of the now-gone trees where Adele Brise had her visions of the Blessed Mother in 1859. Those trees were a maple and a hemlock, according to the Shrine’s history.



A reliquary case is behind the Lady of Grace statue, located in the Apparition Oratory, in the lower level of the Apparition Chapel.

Other than the trees, all of the Shrine’s relics are “first-class relics.” This means that they came from the actual body of the saint. First-class relics can be pieces of bones, hair or even blood.

“The relics represent, for us, two things,” Fr. Broussard said about the display’s importance. “First, they are (from) men and women who lived before us who were worthy of veneration and worthy of our respect insofar that they are very close to God. So we are reminded to ask for their intercession, to ask for their prayers. We believe that they are standing before God’s throne and are very influential in that regard.”

“Secondly, (relics) remind us that we are body and soul and that, after death, we still reverence the body — especially with regard to the saints who were perfected by God’s grace,” he continued. “God’s grace affects not only their souls, but even purifies their very flesh. That is remembered when we reverence the relics of the saintly men and women who went before us: God’s grace is still imbued within their very bodies. So, we give that its due honor and veneration.”

Anyone who believes they might have relics is welcome to contact the Shrine. “We would be happy to look at them,” he said.

While not actually relics, a new addition to the Shrine’s collection is

a permanent set of “The Eucharistic Miracles of the World Exhibit,” designed by Blessed Carlo Acutis. Blessed Carlo documented Eucharistic miracles around the world and cataloged them onto a website which he created before his death from leukemia in 2006. He was 15 years old when he died.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO
St. Maria Goretti relic.

The Champion Shrine Reliquary

In addition to being a place for an intimate encounter with our Blessed Mother, the Apparition Oratory is also home to a multitude of saint relics available for veneration behind the main crowned statue of Our Lady of Grace. On the saint feast days, each relic is brought up to the sanctuary of the Apparition Chapel for the day, with open veneration available for the hour before 11 a.m. Mass. The Shrine currently houses the relics of:

- St. Patrick (3/17)
- St. Mark the Evangelist (4/25)
- St. Philip the Apostle (5/3)
- St. James the Lesser Apostle (5/3)
- St. Matthias the Apostle (5/14)
- St. Barnabas the Apostle (6/11)
- St. Anthony of Padua (6/13)

- St. Peter the Apostle (6/29)
- St. Paul the Apostle (6/29)
- St. Thomas the Apostle (7/3)
- St. Maria Goretti (7/6)
- St. James the Greater Apostle (7/25)
- St. Pope Pius X (8/21)
- St. Bartholomew the Apostle (8/24)
- St. Teresa of Kolkata (9/5)
- St. Matthew the Evangelist (9/21)
- St. Francis of Assisi (10/4)
- St. Maria Faustina Kowalska (10/5)
- St. Teresa of Avila (10/15)
- St. Gerard Majella (10/16)
- St. Luke the Evangelist (10/18)
- St. Simon the Apostle (10/28)
- St. Jude the Apostle (10/28)
- St. Cecilia (11/22)
- St. Andrew the Apostle (11/30)
- St. Barbara (12/4)
- St. Anastasia (12/25)
- St. John the Evangelist (12/27)
- Relic of the True Cross
- The Hemlock and Maple Tree Wood that Our Lady appeared between

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First Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Champion



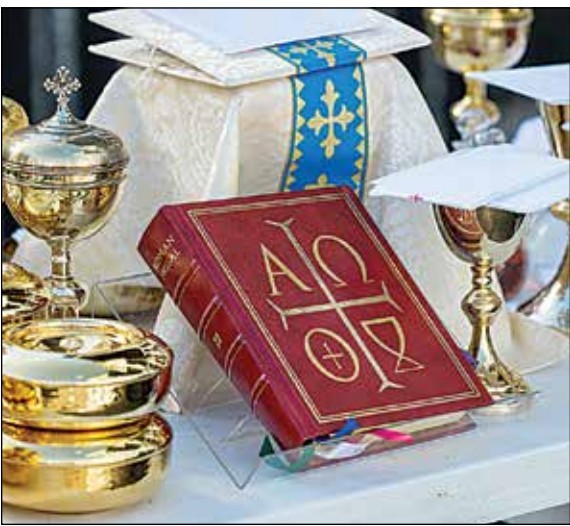
BECKY WALKER | SUBMITTED PHOTO

An image of the sky that many people saw just before the Mass.



PHOTOS BY SCOTT EASTMAN | FOR ON MISSION

The first Solemnity Mass for Our Lady of Champion was held on Oct. 9, 2023, at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, and was attended by 3,500. The above photo shows the rosary procession before the Mass. Bishop David Ricken (lower right), the main celebrant, blessed the congregation during the recessional.



3,500 celebrated first Oct. 9 Solemnity in Champion

Faithful turn out for Our Lady of Champion

BY PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

CHAMPION — The first Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Champion was celebrated Oct. 9, 2023, at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. Bishop David Ricken was celebrant with bishops and many priests concelebrating.

Despite gusty winds and

temperatures in the 50s, 3,500 turned out.

During the Mass, the first reading was offered in Walloon. This Belgian language is the native tongue of Adele Brice, who reported seeing the Queen of Heaven in October 1859. Brice was a Belgian immigrant.

Over the three days of celebration — starting Oct. 7, — more than 7,000 people visited. Milwaukee Archbishop Jerome Listeski was there Oct. 8.

They came from as far as Japan, and in busloads from Minnesota, Illinois and around the diocese.



PHOTOS BY SCOTT EASTMAN | FOR ON MISSION

On this page are images from the Oct. 9, 2023, inaugural Solemnity Mass for Our Lady of Champion at the National Shrine in her honor. Pilgrims of all ages were at the rosary procession before the Mass with Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay and several state bishops, as well as Fr. David Wilton, superior general of the Fathers of Mercy, who staff the Shrine, and many priests and deacons. A reception followed at Mother of Mercy Hall.

Apparition Chapel at National Shrine undergoes updates, new altar was blessed

Renovation completed before busy season and Eucharistic Revival Pilgrimage

BY PATRICIA KASTEN | ON MISSION

CHAMPION — Visitors to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, including pilgrims of the Eucharistic Revival Pilgrimage who arrive on June 16, will enjoy recent changes and updates, all accomplished because of the generosity of donors to the Shrine.

The Apparition Chapel at the Shrine was closed for renovation following the Christmas season until March 2, when Bishop David Ricken dedicated the new wooden altar.

Renovations to the 1942 chapel involved flooring, the pews, sound system, the altar, ambo, credence table and the Communion rail.

The goal was to have all the features harmonize with the back altar, which was placed and consecrated in early 2020.

The project began after Epiphany weekend (Jan. 6-7) and was completed by Saturday, March 2, when Bishop David Ricken consecrated the new altar at 11 a.m. Mass.

Don Warden, chief operations officer at the Shrine, said that everything blends with the wood tones of the back altar. That altar, a reclaimed piece dating to the 1900s, had been updated and stained to blend with the wood beams on the ceiling.

The pews, which were installed less than 20 years ago, received a deep cleaning and polish. The new flooring is ceramic tile and replaces the original vinyl tile flooring.

Warden said that the flooring is brighter, “without grabbing attention. All the visual attention will go up front” to the new altar and renovated sanctuary.

Another new feature is the Communion rail, which looks like wood, but contains a secret.

“What we ended up doing was taking laser scans of the wood carvings on the renovated back altar. We scanned those and printed them with a 3-D printer.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION (SAM LUCERO) | SUBMITTED PHOTO

On March 2, 2024, a celebration Mass at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion included the dedication of the new altar. Bishop David Ricken dedicated the altar and celebrated the Mass.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION (SAM LUCERO) | SUBMITTED PHOTO

On March 2, 2024, the dedication of the new altar at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion was celebrated by Bishop David Ricken. He anoints the altar with Holy Chrism.

So the rail will look like wood to everybody — that’s how we got the exact match,” said Warden.

It’s a solution to what Warden said could have been “challenging and expensive” if they had tried to handcraft a wood Communion rail to match the back altar.

Using the 3-D printer gave them the option of using “new technology for an old look,” Warden said.

Achieving that old look was enhanced by the work of artist Sr. Caritas Marie Le Claire, a Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity, Manitowoc. In 2020, she worked on the intricate designs on the paneled turnstile on the back altar when it was installed. Her work also included gold leaf on the altar spires.

“Sr. Caritas brought out her paintbrushes,” said Warden, and painted all 36 pillars of the new Communion rail so they would match the back altar.

A renovation project of this size takes a lot of planning. For example, Warden said the tiles were purchased ahead of time due to expected rises in cost.

And then there was the timing. “When we decided to do the floor,” Warden said, “we knew (the Shrine) would be shut down, so it was also time to do the (new front) altar. All the projects we had in mind drove the timing.”

With the size of the project, the staff planned to use what are the slow months at the Shrine — winter.

“There is not any other 6 to 8 weeks in the year to get that done,” Warden said. “We were fairly busy over Christmas — weather-wise things get quiet (in winter).”

As with any renovation project, there was some inconvenience.

For example, Warden said when the old flooring was removed, there was the noise from grinders. But Warden said they scheduled work for early morning before the gift shop opened. It shares a wall with the chapel.

“We couldn’t have done things like this without using Mother of Mercy Hall,” Warden said. “If we hadn’t had that, well, you’d be shutting the whole Shrine.”

Daily and Sunday Mass, Adoration and confessions were held in the hall during the renovation project.

Mother of Mercy Hall, which was dedicated on April 28, 2019, is the Shrine’s largest gathering space. It is used for conferences and other special events, as well as Mass.

Renovation of the Apparition Chapel was entirely funded by generous donations to the Shrine’s “Adele’s Wish List,” said Warden.

Adele’s Wish List was named in honor of Adele Brice, whose visions of the Blessed Mother were the foundation of the Shrine.

“We put the renovation needs out there and it’s amazing how people who stop in and say, ‘What you need, we’ll help you to get that done,’” said Warden.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Franciscan Sr. Caritas Marie Le Claire works on applying gold paint to one of 35 pillars that make up the new Communion rail at the upper chapel in the Shrine.

From Guadalupe Shrine to Champion Shrine

Four seminarians share their pilgrimage experience

BY SHRINE STAFF | FOR ON MISSION

“Lord, I need you to pick up my foot, and I will put it down.”

As Nick, Rob, Benedict and Carl arrived at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, there was no time to waste. “Our goal was to make it for 11a.m. Mass,” said Nick, smiling. And that is exactly what they did.

After Mass on the grounds of the Shrine, the four men and their loved ones stepped outside of the chapel, dropped their backpacks and rested in the sun. A feeling of gratitude surrounded their little group – gratitude to the Lord for the Grace given to accomplish their long pilgrimage.

THE JOURNEY

Diocese of Green Bay seminarians Nick Vande Hey, Rob Reynebeau and Benedict Wood, as well as Diocese of Superior seminarian Carl Oman joined together to complete a 225-plus mile walking pilgrimage from the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in La Crosse, Wisconsin, to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.

Their pilgrimage was 11 days long and consisted of walking, praying in



Seminarians Nick Vande Hey, left, Rob Reynebeau, Carl Oman, and Benedict Wood are pictured on the grounds of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.

silence, sacrificing together and singing. “We sang a lot,” said Vande Hey, with a chuckle.

When asked what their favorite

songs, they agreed, “Any Marian hymns.”

“But, also, some country!” added Reynebeau.

For lodging along the journey, they called ahead to parishes in the communities they passed through and priests connected them to parishioners who would be open to hosting the seminarians.

“We knew where we were going, or at least we knew there was a person expecting us, but sometimes these were complete strangers,” said Vande Hey.

After determining their stops and their Six Rules of Life on the pilgrimage, they were off.

THE SIX RULES OF LIFE

The four men kept the following Six Rules of Life to connect them to God and embrace the spirit of pilgrimage:

- 1. Embrace the Cross.
Overall, no complaining. Unite their sufferings – the blisters, the cold feet, the frustrations that arose – to the suffering of Christ.
- 2. If you need something, ask. If you don’t need something, don’t ask. Accept whatever is offered to you.
This was ultimately how the four seminarians approached the concept of begging.
“We were begging for our basic needs throughout the course of this pilgrimage as a way to surrender to God’s providence,” said Wood.
- 3. End every day with zero dollars or have a plan to give it away.
In the spirit of “give us this day our daily bread” they would end their day with zero dollars. While they were sometimes given money during the

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The Rector of Champion Shrine, Fr. Joseph Aytona, gave the four men a blessing when they arrived to the Shrine.

pilgrimage, the four men said they did not want to get a donation and be set for the week, only to take care of themselves.

“We wanted to give people the opportunity to enter into the pilgrimage by helping provide for us, and for us to trust that God would provide,” said Wood.

4. Live liturgically.

This was how they prayed throughout the course of the pilgrimage. They would begin each day by praying through some of the intentions they were carrying and then spent 45 minutes in silence. They would do the same after lunch – 45 minutes of silence preceded by praying half the sheet of the intentions they were carrying. Each day, they prayed all five of the hours of the Breviary on the road together or sometimes completed evening prayer at the place they were stopping for the night. They would pray several rosaries together and, if walking during the 3 o’clock hour, they would pray the Stations of the Cross.

“As we progressed through the pilgrimage together, there would be longer periods of silence, more prayer, more growth in our interior life as we got closer and closer to our destination,” Wood explained.

5. Live with a spirit of trusting spontaneity.

They wanted to trust that, not only would God take care of them, but that God would provide awesome opportunities in front of them. Sometimes, they would go off-trail to check out a church and pray there for a while, or just take risks.

“One day we were staying with a family, and they had a 7-year-old who was asking for ice cream. So, we went out to Dairy Queen and got them Dilly Bars because we had money that we had to donate that day,” said Wood. “It was just embracing this joy and trusting that, while we are embracing the Cross, we are also going to be provided opportunities to give, to love and to enter into the joy of the Lord.”

6. Become a saint.

“This life is passing. We are called to strive and trust that God will supply the Grace we need to enter into eternal life,” said Wood, looking out onto the Shrine’s grounds. “That is the purpose of the pilgrimage – to remind us that in our day-to-day life, we are pilgrims marching towards the heavenly Jerusalem, marching towards eternal life. That is the goal. That is what our life is oriented towards.”

THE SPIRIT OF PILGRIMAGE

What does pilgrimage mean to each of you?



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Seminarians Nick Vande Hey, left, Rob Reynebeau, Carl Oman, and Benedict Wood with family and friends.

Nick Vande Hey

Pilgrimage is an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord with an eternal perspective and for him to draw close to you... to recognize in a small way the larger journey that we are participating in.

Benedict Wood

Pilgrimage for me is an opportunity to depend totally on the Lord. Particularly related to this pilgrimage – when you are pushing yourself to your physical limit, when you are begging for your needs, when you are living a life that radically is dependent on God – any ideas of independence start to disappear, and you come face-to-face with your poverty before the Lord. There were times with every step I would pray, “Lord, I need you to pick up my foot, and I will put it down.”

Carl Oman

Pilgrimage is a microcosm of life. In these 11 days, we were able to experience the whole journey – with its joys and struggles. It makes a big analogy to life itself, our journey as a pilgrim church. When we first started off, it was exciting and full of anticipation. Then, a few days in, we are on the longest, straightest stretch of highway and you start to recognize you can’t just do this anymore on your own. But this shows us a glimpse of our own life – and, especially as seminarians, our life as priests.

Rob Reynebeau

I really relate pilgrimage to the full journey of life. Throughout this pilgrimage, I’ve felt the full range of emotions that we experience in life. Time spent on pilgrimage allows us to be more attentive to the full movements of our heart and to create greater intimacy with Jesus. Especially as a seminarian, I was grateful to fully claim this

time to discern what Jesus wanted to reveal to me on this pilgrimage, while simultaneously reflecting on my life – who I’m trying to serve, what my goal is, what my intentions are.

A CONNECTION TO THE NATIONAL EUCHARISTIC PILGRIMAGE

From May to July 2024, the National Eucharistic Revival will begin its National Eucharistic Pilgrimage across the United States. Four different routes will be offered for pilgrims to participate in, all converging in Indianapolis on July 16 for the 10th National Eucharistic Congress. One of the routes, known as the Marian Route, will pass through many Midwest Shrines devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary, including The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, the first and only approved Marian Apparition Site in the United States.

The Marian Route will follow in similar steps to what these four men did in walking from La Crosse to Champion. “We are just warming up the trail for

them,” said Vande Hey, smiling. “Make straight his paths.”

WE ARE ALL CALLED TO PILGRIMAGE

When asked if they would recommend pilgrimage to others, “Of course!” said Vande Hey. “The Lord just reveals so much and pours forth an abundance of Grace when we give him our time.”

While we may not all be able to walk 225-plus miles from La Crosse to Champion as these men did, the spirit of pilgrimage lies in the hearts of us all. Whether intentionally traveling to a sacred site, living out our vocation and nurturing it in others, or by doing God’s will daily – we are all pilgrims. The question remains for each of us to ponder: “How can we best embrace our journey as we walk towards our heavenly destination?”

Our Lady of Guadalupe, Pray For Us! Our Lady of Champion, Pray For Us!

To plan a pilgrimage to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, check out championshrine.org/visit to find resources, planning guides and travel information.

The Green Bay Diocesan Council of Catholic Women



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How the church addresses claims of Marian apparitions

The process is lengthy because many witnesses must be questioned

BY CAROL GLATZ | CATHOLIC NEWS SERVICE

VATICAN CITY — When Bishop David Ricken of Green Bay in 2010 recognized a series of Marian apparitions from 1859, it marked the first time apparitions in the United States received official approval.

That’s quite an achievement considering that more than 1,500 visions of Mary have been reported around the world, but in the past century only nine cases have received official church approval as being “worthy of belief,” said an expert in Marian apparitions.

The church has made very few judgments on apparition claims. “It’s not always possible to ascertain if they are true or false because the phenomenon is much bigger than us,” said Marianist Fr. Salvatore Perrella, past president of the Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum in Rome and a theologian who has also served as an expert for the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The enormous job of determining the veracity of an apparition falls to the local bishop, said Fr. Perrella.

To help with that task, the Vatican established a set of norms in 1978 to guide the process of discernment and



The statue of Our Lady of Grace, located in the Apparition Oratory, sits directly under the statue of Mary in the Apparition Chapel above. It sits near, if not over, the reported site where Mary appeared to Adele Brise in October of 1859.

the investigation of reported apparitions and revelations.

The process “is never brief,” said Fr. Perrella. For example, the Green Bay apparitions (now known as Our Lady of Champion) received approval 151 years after the first apparition was reported, but that’s just half of the nearly 300 years it took the church to approve the apparitions of Our Lady of Laus in France, he said.

The process is lengthy because visionaries and witnesses must be questioned and “the fruits of the apparitions, such as conversions, miracles and healings,” must be examined, he said.

The local bishop sets up a commis-

sion of experts, including theologians, canonists, psychologists and doctors, to help him.

According to the norms, the bishop and his commission “must determine the veracity of the facts and the mental, moral and spiritual wholesomeness and seriousness of the visionary and his or her testimony,” he said.

Fr. Perrella said that when the bishop’s investigation is complete, he can come to one of three conclusions:

- he can determine the apparition to be true and worthy of belief;
- he can say it is not true, which leaves open the possibility for an appeal;

■ or he can say that, at the moment, he doesn’t know and needs more help.

In the last scenario, the investigation is brought to the country’s bishops’ conference, Fr. Perrella said. If the body of bishops cannot come to a conclusion, then the matter is turned over to the pope who delegates the doctrinal congregation to step in and either give advice, send a commissioner and/or set up a commission to investigate.

At every step of the investigation, “the person in charge of everything is the bishop,” he said.

The church approaches each claim “with the maximum prudence, investigative rigor and an invitation to live out the Gospel rather than follow the apparitions,” he said.

In fact, the church never requires the faithful to believe in the Marian apparitions, not even those recognized by the church, he said.

The Catholic Church affirms that Mary was assumed, body and soul, into heaven and that she, like Christ, defeated death and triumphs in heavenly glory with the totality of her being.

For that reason, Fr. Perrella said, Mary can appear in bodily form while the saints or other deceased can’t.

“Mary never comes on her own accord; she is ‘God’s ambassador’” charged with a specific message for a specific time and place, he said.

While the apparitions and messages are never the same, in general, Mary appeals for people’s conversion and seeks to assure men and women that they can depend on God’s loving mercy, he said.

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Young people attending SEEK24 express their love for Our Lady of Champion

BY SHRINE STAFF | FOR ON MISSION

In January 2024, the Shrine’s communication team was honored to represent The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion at SEEK24.

Hosted by the Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS), SEEK is an annual Catholic conference for young people — and the young at heart — to gather and encounter Jesus through prayer, talks and friendship.

Over 24,000 people gathered in St. Louis for the four-day SEEK24 conference, including many Catholic orders and apostolates from around the country. These organizations had the opportunity to sponsor the conference and share their mission with attendees at their booth. The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion was one of them.

The Shrine’s communications team talked to hundreds of students individually to share the story of Our Lady and her apparition in Champion, Wisconsin, and saw an incredible response. Here are some of the sweet stories that came from the SEEK24 booth:

■ The Shrine set up a life-size cutout of Our Lady of Champion and encouraged those passing to take a picture with Mary. The Shrine’s team placed signs next to the cutout of Our Lady so people could use them in their pictures. Throughout the conference, people stopped to take a picture with her, holding up signs, such as, “I <3 Our Lady,” “Mamma’s Boy” and “Go & Fear Nothing, I Will Help You.” A favorite was seeing little children come up to the cutout of Mary, touch it, and exclaim, “Mamma!”

■ Many of the students who the Shrine’s team talked to were familiar with Our Lady of Champion. They shared how the Shrine was on their travel bucket list, or that they talk about Our Lady of Champion all the time with people on their college campus. Often, the Shrine’s team would hear, “Oh, that’s where Mary appeared in Wisconsin, right? I want to go there so badly!”

■ A man came up to the booth and shared his story of how he proposed to his now-wife at the Champion Shrine. He said he couldn’t think of a better place to ask the question.

■ One young person walked over to the Shrine’s booth to tell us that he is in the RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion booth with life-size cutout of Our Lady at the SEEK24: Be the Light at the America’s Center Convention Complex in St. Louis Jan. 1– 5, 2024, with an attendance of more than 24,000.

for Adults) program and attributes his faith conversion to a stop at the Shrine while on a work trip in Wisconsin. “I just feel like she spoke to me there,” he said.

■ On one of the last days, a woman stopped by the Shrine’s booth, pulled out her necklace, and showed her medal of Our Lady of Champion. “The Shrine is so close to my heart,” she exclaimed as she told a touching story of how the Champion medal was with her when her sister passed away from cancer. “I have no idea how, but the medal of Our Lady dropped from my necklace to the ground. As I picked it up, my sister passed away. And I just knew Our Lady was with her in those final moments.”

■ While a lot of people recognized Our Lady of Champion, the Shrine’s team encountered many who were unfamiliar and felt drawn to visit the booth to learn more. It was wonderful to see how each person’s eyes would light up with wonder upon hearing that Our Blessed Mother visited a little town in Wisconsin. Each time, it would be met with responses like, “Wow, I never knew,” or “That’s incredible,” or even, “No way! I need to share this with my friends.” When people hear about Our Lady of Champion, they never forget it.

Overall, it was such a joy to be present at SEEK24 and share the gift of Our Lady of Champion with the young people. Our Church is truly present and alive in their hearts.

As the Shrine continues to be present at these conferences, please hold us in prayer! If you’d like to learn how you can support the communications efforts of the Shrine at conferences such as SEEK, please email media@championshrine.org or call (920) 866-2571, ext. 111.



THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION | SUBMITTED PHOTO

Family posing with Our Lady at the SEEK24 Convention in St. Louis.



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Shrine has strong ties for those with Belgian roots

Volunteer remembers that her great-grandfather learned about his faith from Adele Brise in the 1860s

BY BENJAMIN WIDEMAN | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION — Joan Dalebroux’s family roots run deep at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.

So deep, in fact, they date all the way back to the Shrine’s origin in 1859.

In October of that year, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Adele Brise as the 28-year-old walked to church here along a wooded trail, telling her, in part, “Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation.”

Two months later, in December of 1859, Dalebroux’s great-grandfather, Isadore Boucher, was born in Chicago to parents who had emigrated from Belgium, Adele’s home country.

Not long after, the Bouchers moved to this area, and Isadore became one of the children taught by Adele as she followed the Blessed Virgin Mary’s instructions.

“I feel so fortunate, so blessed, that my family has such a connection, such a strong love for the chapel and Adele Brise and our religious history here,” said Dalebroux, 84, who was 12 when her great-grandfather died in 1950.

Dalebroux is among the area residents whose families, many of Belgian descent, have worshiped at the site of the Shrine for decades. Seven generations in Dalebroux’s family have been here — stretching from her great-great-grandparents to her grandchildren (she also has three great-grandchildren who live outside of northeast Wisconsin).

In 2010, Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay formally approved the Marian Apparitions that took place on the grounds of the Shrine as “worthy of belief.” In 2016, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops declared the grounds of Our Lady of Champion as a national shrine.

Dalebroux (*nee* Gillis) speaks with youthful enthusiasm about the chapel there and her upbringing in the countryside 15 miles northeast of Green Bay.

She was born May 11, 1938, on her grandparents’ farm in Dyckesville, just a few miles from Champion. At the age of 2, Dalebroux and her family moved to a Norbertine farm across from Bay Shore Park. For the first two decades of her life — and then again for the past 30-plus years — her home parish has



BENJAMIN WIDEMAN | FOR ON MISSION

Joan Dalebroux, of the township of Red River, volunteers at the Welcome Center at The National Shrine. She holds a photo of her great-grandparents, Emma and Isadore Boucher. Isadore was born in Chicago, the child of Belgian immigrants. The Bouchers moved to the Champion area in 1859 and Isadore became one of the children taught by Adele Brise. Dalebroux was 12 years old when her great-grandfather died in 1950.

been St. Louis, Dyckesville.

She and her husband, Gene, married in 1958 and attended St. Odile Catholic Church in nearby Thiry Daems for about 30 years until it closed in 1992. They then returned to St. Louis Parish.

Throughout her life, Dalebroux has worshiped at the current chapel — located where Adele’s father built the first chapel in 1859. She said she usually prayed here at least once a week — perhaps once every two weeks while raising her children — equating to more than 3,000 visits in her lifetime.

“My earliest memory of ‘The Chapel’ (an early name for the current Shrine), is going there with my grandma (Frances Gillis),” Dalebroux said. “I was just a young girl when I went with her, but I still remember that it smelled so new. This current chapel was built in 1941, so it was brand new at that time. It had a pleasant, woody smell. I remember thinking, ‘This new church smells so good.’”

“And my grandma, she loved the chapel,” Dalebroux added. “We would go there often during the war (World War II) since we had family in the service. One of my uncles was in a submarine in the South Pacific. My grandma would be so concerned because she wouldn’t hear from him for a month at a time. So she’d walk all the way to the chapel and pray her rosary every step.”

For decades, people sought comfort at the site of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help. And Dalebroux’s family was no different in that regard.

“When we would go to Tuesday evening devotions, the chapel would be full from the front to the back,” Dalebroux said. “Everyone was together, praying for the end of the war. So many people had sons or daughters or parents or brothers in the service. We all were worried and wanted to see the war end.”

She also recalls visiting “The Chapel” for many years on Aug. 15 on the feast of the Assumption.

“We always went to that,” she said. “Never missed it. I remember seeing my friends there that day, too.”

Delving further into her family history, Dalebroux said her great-grandfather, Isadore Boucher, and his family went to the chapel during the Peshtigo Fire in 1871.

The fire (which took place on Oct. 8, 1871, the same night as the Great Chicago Fire) destroyed much of the surrounding area except the grounds of the chapel, its convent, school and five acres of land consecrated to the Virgin Mary. Pilgrimages increased after that, as did the devotions on Aug. 15.

“He was 12 years old when the fire was happening,” Dalebroux said of her

great-grandfather. “They all went to the chapel to pray. Even some people who weren’t Catholic went there. It was an oasis from the fire.

“Because my great-grandfather was taught by Sr. Adele (as people called Adele), I think maybe that’s why my grandmother, after she was born, had so much faith and trust in going to the chapel for her whole life.”

Dalebroux has carried on that tradition, regularly attending Mass at the chapel and volunteering about once per week in the Welcome Center. She also assists during Eucharistic Adoration.

“I like that I meet people from all over,” she said. “It’s unbelievable the distances people come for their pilgrimage. In summer, especially, I really enjoy seeing so many people. They tell me their stories and sometimes I tell them my story. I answer questions as best I can and point people in the right direction.”

She recalls one interaction with a visitor about six years ago while volunteering in the Oratory Chapel.

“I was standing in the back, in case anyone had a question, and this lady came up and said, ‘Do you smell that sweet smell like roses?’” Dalebroux said she did not.

So the woman told her that she had been praying in front of the Blessed Mother’s statue and caught, on the breeze, a sweet smell of roses.

Dalebroux said the woman told her, “It’s the same smell I experienced when my mother passed away.”

Although Adele passed away in 1896, Dalebroux said she feels a special bond with her.

“I feel really close to her in a way,” Dalebroux said. “I pray to her. When I go to the chapel, depending where I’m parked, I stop by her grave and say a prayer. Whenever I arrive at the chapel and get out of my car, I’m stepping on holy ground. It’s a place of peace. I’m always happy to be there. And as long as I’m able to, I’ll always go there.”

Dalebroux and her husband haven’t ventured far from the chapel over the years.

When asked what changes she might like to see at the Shrine in the years ahead, Dalebroux said:

“I’m happy with the way things are going. We just have to always realize the Blessed Mother is the one who’s in charge there, not us.”

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MARIAN APPARITIONS

that have received church recognition over the last three centuries.



1. LOURDES, FRANCE

1858: A beautiful lady, who identifies herself as the “Immaculate Conception,” appears to 14-year-old Bernadette Soubirous.

2. AKITA, JAPAN

1973: Mary gives Sister Agnes Katsuko Sasagawa three messages.

3. BEAURAING, BELGIUM

1932-1933: A group of children see visions of Mary between late November and January.

4. BANNEUX, BELGIUM

1933: A young girl named Mariette Beco, who came from a poor, lapsed-Catholic family, said Mary appeared to her on eight occasions, encouraging her to pray.

5. LAUS, FRANCE

1664-1718: A series of daily Marian apparitions lasting 54 years are experienced by young French shepherdess Benoitte Rencurel.

6. QUITO, ECUADOR

1594: Under the title Our Lady of Good Success, Mary appears to Spanish-born Mother Mariana de Jesus Torres.

7. FATIMA, PORTUGAL

1917: Apparitions of Mary appear to Lúcia dos Santos and two of her cousins on the 13th day of six consecutive months.

8. TUY, SPAIN

1929: Lúcia dos Santos reports that Mary returned and repeated her request for the consecration of Russia to her Immaculate Heart.

9. GREEN BAY, WISCONSIN

1859: Marian visions received by Adele Brise are the first in the United States to receive approval of a diocesan bishop.

10. KIBEHO, RWANDA

1980s: Mary appears at an all-girls Catholic high school in this remote village.

11. MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

1531: Mary appears to Indigenous peasant St. Juan Diego near the present-day capital.

Source: Marianist Father Salvatore Perrella, assistant dean of faculty at the Pontifical Theological Faculty Marianum ©2011 CNS

Belgian wayside shrines offer road signs of devotion

Chapels built by Belgian immigrants dot Brown, Door and Kewaunee counties

BY PATRICIA KASTEN |
ON MISSION



ON MISSION FILE PHOTO

A wayside chapel, originally erected in Dyckesville, was moved to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in 2003. It stands near the northern edge of the property.

CHAMPION — In your travels around northeast Wisconsin’s Door County, you might notice small, frame buildings that look like farm sheds — except for the little crosses on top. There are more than two dozen of these wayside or roadside chapels dotting Door, northern Brown and Kewaunee counties. They were built by Belgian immigrants and their descendants.

For example, there is Our Mother of Perpetual Help Chapel at 9861 W. Swamp Road and St. Roch Chapel at 1257 County Highway DK, both open to the public.

There is also a chapel, originally built in Dyckesville, that was moved to the grounds of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in 2003.

These chapels — generally housing an altar, statues, a cross and a place to sit and/or kneel — were built by families as places for prayer or in gratitude for help, such as healing from an illness.

The wayside chapel that was moved to the grounds of the Shrine was restored by Tory Thiry and his family.

While located on private land, the chapels were always placed so that they were near a road and accessible to all. Some are now on private property.

For a map and addresses, visit walloonbelgiansdoorpeninsula.weebly.com/chapels-map.html.

The chapels, sporting individual styles, dot the landscape and farmlands of Door, Brown and Kewaunee counties.

For example, St. Odile Chapel has its little stained-glass window over the doorway in Thiry Daems and the Blessed Virgin Mary Chapel has its blue cross above the door in Tonet.

There is St. Ghislain Chapel in Misere, standing exactly where the St. Michael Church in Misere did until the mid-1970s.

Each chapel has its own rustic charm. Some have candles to light. Others have holy water fonts for blessing. Many have guestbooks with names from around Wisconsin, the Midwest and even overseas, like the woman from England who visited St. Odile Chapel in 2019.

When you stop at these chapels, local people will notice you and, should you have questions, are glad to help. Most are willing to share some local stories.

Wayside or roadside chapels of a variety of types are not unique to Wisconsin. Their roots actually date to Roman and Greek times, when statues of Hermes (the Greek god of travelers), set in small shrines, would guide travelers along commonly traveled routes.

Wayside shrines can be found across Europe, from Poland and Slovenia to Italy and France, Belgium and England. They range in size from single pillars, called “column shrines” and *Schöpflöf-fel* shrines (meaning “serving spoon” or “scoop” in German), to roofed boxes nailed to trees to more elaborate chapel-shrines.

In France, you can find *calvaires* (stone crucifixion scenes), some dating to the eighth century, and often placed along travel routes, though many have been lost over the centuries.

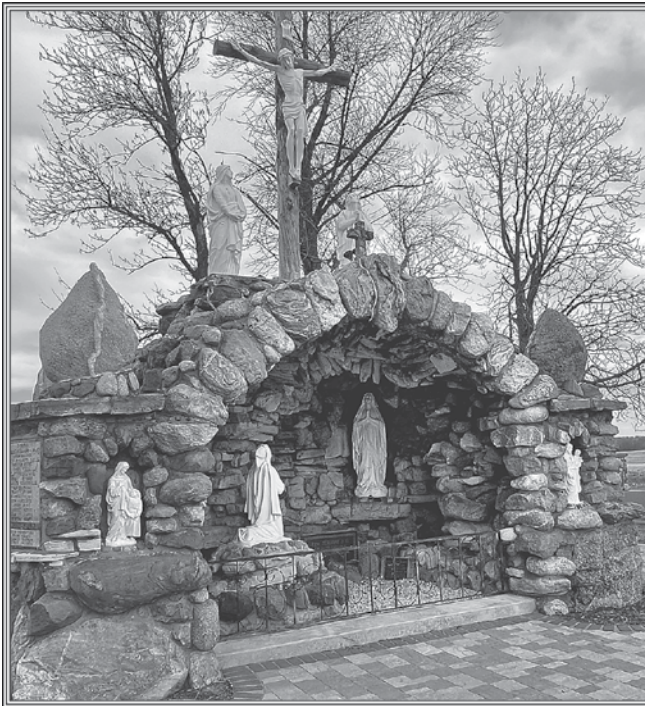
Wayside shrines were often located along routes taken by pilgrims to famous shrines, placed at crossroads or major geographic sites, such as mountaintops or springs and fountains.

Many of the roadside chapels in Door County are along routes leading to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, which has been a pilgrimage site since Adele Brise’s visions in 1859.

Wayside shrines don’t always have to be a building. Even the humble bathtub shrines seen in yards from the Midwest to the East Coast, sometimes adorned with seashells, can qualify as wayside shrines. Made from a half-buried, cast iron tub, these shrines most often hold a statue of Mary, but can also hold a cross or a statue of another saint.

Another development you will see in northeast Wisconsin are rosaries — often lighted — on the sides of houses. While not technically a wayside shrine, these memorials that honor Mary nonetheless mark places of prayer and remind us to turn toward God on all our journeys.

Sources: fisheaters.com; wikipedia.org; ncregister.com; waysideshrines.org and walloonbelgiansdoorpeninsula.weebly.com



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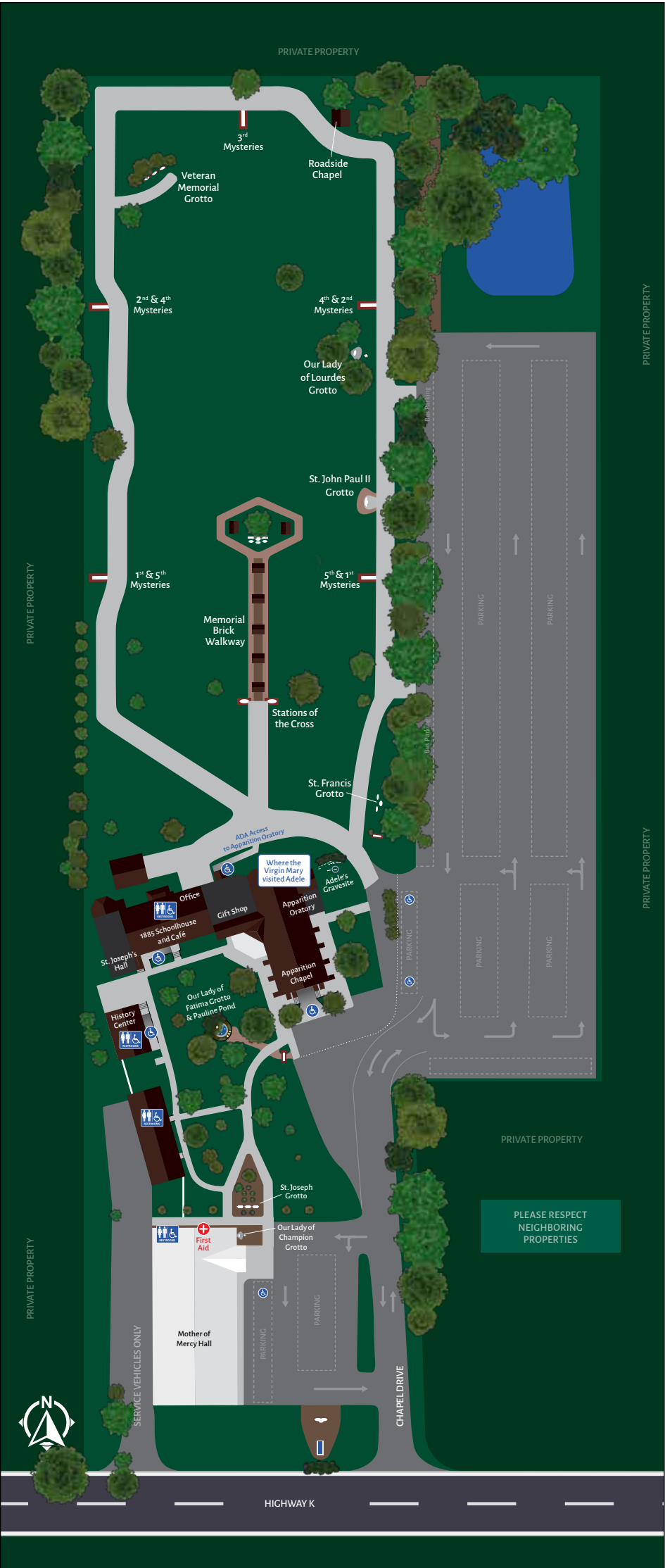
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SUBMITTED GRAPHIC FROM THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

This map shows the grounds of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. To the south, shown on the bottom, is County Highway K. Highlights include the chapel building, Adele Brise’s grave, the History Center, Mother of Mercy Hall and the 1885 Schoolhouse with museum and cafe.

Belgian Fact

In 1861, the second chapel was built by the community faithful. They inscribed the words “*Notre Dame De Bon Secours, Priez Pour Nous*” over the chapel’s entrance, translated as “Our Lady of Good Help, Pray for Us.” This is related to a popular Belgian Marian devotion to Our Lady of Good Help that goes back to the 12th century in Brussels, Belgium.

Source: The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion

Heavenly light over resting place



ON MISSION FILE PHOTO

A rainbow after a storm shines over Adele Brise’s grave (left) next to the chapel at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion.

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Peshtigo fire drove people to the safety of Adele’s chapel grounds

FROM PAGE 6

blowing from several points of the compass alternately. First from the southwest, then from the west, then from the northwest, then back again to the south, during which time we were visited by a series of whirlwinds which showered cinders and sparks in every conceivable direction. ... From the rear of J.S. Dickey’s store in the direction of the Bay all was one broad lurid sheet of flame as far as the eye could reach.”

Fr. Pernin survived that night by staying in the river, though his eyes were damaged by the heat — leaving him blinded for a time. He also became sick from the chill of being soaked in the cold water. Like him, many people stayed in the river all night.

By morning, as he later saw for himself, the entire neighborhood around the Shrine had lost houses to the flames, but not the school, chapel or even the fence around the six acres of the chapel grounds had been touched.

THE CHAPEL SURVIVES FIRE

Further south and east of Peshti-

go, lower Door County and northern Brown and Kewaunee counties were also burning. (The town of Brussels was destroyed by the fire.) Adele Brise and her companions at The Chapel knew they could not escape the fire. So they took the statue of Mary from the chapel and bore it in procession around the grounds. They were joined

by local people fleeing from the flames. Fr. Pernin, in recording what Adele told him later, said they processed around the grounds on their knees, praying the rosary.

By morning, “the houses and fences in the neighborhood had been burned with the exception of the school, the chapel and fence surrounding the six acres of land consecrated to the Blessed Virgin.”

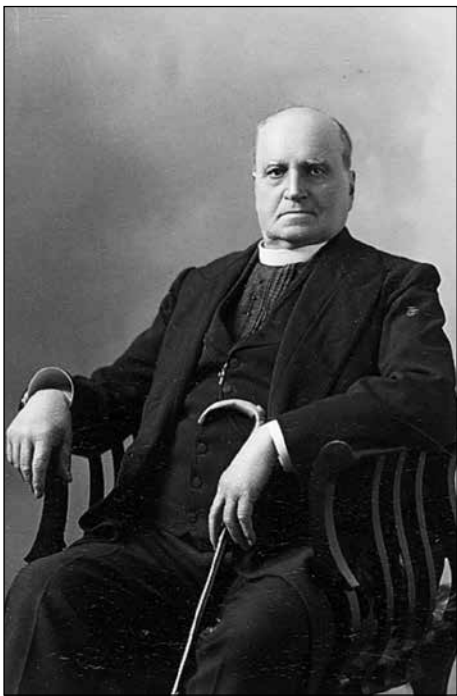
Fr. Peter Pernin

in another direction continued to hope and pray.”

By morning, he continued, all “the houses and fences in the neighborhood had been burned with the exception of the school, the chapel and fence surrounding the six acres of land consecrated to the Blessed Virgin.”

TURNING IN ANOTHER DIRECTION

“When the flame and wind blew so strongly in the direction of the chapel as to prevent their further progress, unless they exposed themselves to suffocation,” Fr. Pernin wrote, “they awaited a lull in the storm or turning



COURTESY OF DIOCESAN ARCHIVES | FOR ON MISSION

Fr. Peter Pernin, a Canadian missionary priest who served as pastor at St. Mary Parish in Peshtigo and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Marinette in 1871, wrote one of the most descriptive accounts of the Peshtigo Fire in his memoir “The Finger of God Was There!”

Fr. Pernin noted that around the area not burned by the fire, a “winding path surrounding the enclosure being only eight or 10 feet wide... now shone out like an emerald island amid a sea of ashes.”

The priest, who oversaw the rebuilding of his two Marinette and Peshtigo



ON MISSION FILE PHOTO

A reflection of a statue of Our Lady of Grace, located in the Apparition Oratory at the Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, is seen in a framed picture of Adele Brise. “Sr. Adele,” as she was called by locals, led the people in prayer around the grounds during the night of the Peshtigo Fire.

churches, stopped short of calling either the salvaging of the Peshtigo tabernacle or the survival of the chapel grounds “a miracle.” But he added that he “earnestly counseled” anyone who could do so to visit Adele to question her about the events and “return edified and happy at heart.”



“ 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 of Champion, October 1859



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9:00 am - 4:00 pm (Sept. - April)

MASS

Daily & Sunday | 11:00 am
Tues. & Sat. | Additional 8:30 am Mass
Wednesday | Additional 5:45 pm Mass
Sundays May-October | Additional 8:30 am Mass

CONFESSION

Daily | 10:00 am, after 11:00 am Mass, & 2:00 pm
Saturday | after 8:30 am Mass

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