

CHAMPION

“I am the Queen of Heaven”

2026 Issue

Champion, Wisconsin



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Thousands gather at Our Lady of Champion for Jubilee Mass

BY CHRISTINE ROUSSELLE | FOR ALETEIA

Thousands of people made the trek to the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion for a Mass for the Jubilee Year of Hope, followed by a procession of the Mission Cross of the Fathers of Mercy.

Thousands of people gathered at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion, Wisconsin, for a Mass celebrating the Jubilee Year of Hope on July 20.

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion was designated as a "Jubilee Pilgrimage Site" for the Jubilee Year of Hope. Mass was celebrated by Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay.

Our Lady of Champion is the name given to the Marian apparition that took place at the site in 1859. It is the first, and so far, only, Marian apparition in the United States to have been approved by the Catholic Church.

"Many pilgrims that day had wanted to come to the Shrine for a while," Fr. Nathanael Mudd, CPM, told Aleteia after the procession. "When they found out about the Jubilee Mass for the Year of Hope, they decided to make that the center of their trip to visit the site of Our Lady's apparition."

The pilgrims, said Mudd, were full of "anticipation and hope," and there was a "wonderful atmosphere of gratitude and peace" at the Shrine.

Mudd, a member of the Fathers of Mercy, was able to carry the Mission Cross during part of the pilgrimage, something he told Aleteia was a "huge blessing."

"I thought a lot about the faith of those who attended the early missions, whose dates are inscribed on the cross, and how we still have that



PHOTO BY SAM LUCERO
A worshipper venerates the Jubilee Mission Cross used during the 2025 Jubilee Year procession at the National Shrine of Champion. The cross is inscribed with the message: "He who perseveres will be blessed forever."

faith today," he said.

"I was also thinking of carrying the cross in reparation for sins, in particular, praying in preparation for the sins of priests," said Mudd.

Each of the pilgrims had their own reasons for coming to the Shrine, said Mudd, but many were looking for healing, or "even asking for hope in their despair."

"I think a lot of people have found that at the feet of the Blessed Virgin Mary, with an assurance that she will hear and intercede for them, maybe sooner

than later."

"The great thing is, the fact that they made the effort to make a pilgrimage here already speaks to a mustard seed-sized hope which God has given them, in that they hope to receive more here," he said.

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Sainthood cause opens for Adele Brice, who witnessed first approved U.S. Marian apparitions



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

BY KATE QUIÑONES | FOR EWTN NEWS

The Catholic Church has officially opened the cause for sainthood of Belgian immigrant Adele Brice, an illiterate woman who had visions of the Blessed Mother.

In a decree by a Wisconsin bishop on Friday, the Catholic Church officially opened the cause for sainthood of a Belgian immigrant who had visions of the Blessed Mother.

Adele Brice (1831–1896) couldn't read or write, but she traveled the countryside of Wisconsin on foot teaching children and families about God. Brice is most well known for three apparitions she had, which are the only approved Marian apparitions to have happened in the United States.

Last year, more than 200,000 pilgrims visited the shrine to Our Lady of Champion in Wisconsin, Father Anthony Stephens, the Father of Mercy who serves as a rector of the shrine, told EWTN News.

From the time Brice first received holy Communion as a young girl in Belgium, she felt a calling to religious life. But when her family decided to immigrate to the United States, she went with them, trusting her parish priest who encouraged her to go.

She would never become a religious sister, "but she remained faithful to that fundamental calling," said Bishop David Ricken of Green Bay, Wisconsin, who promulgated the decree on Jan. 30.

"What moves me particularly about

her is perseverance," added Father John Girotti, the vicar general and moderator of the curia for the Diocese of Green Bay. "She moved to this country with her parents when she was in her 20s. She didn't necessarily want to come, but she came out of respect for her mom and her dad."

Brice was also blind in one eye because of a childhood injury.

"She had her faith. She loved God. And she persevered," Girotti continued. "Her faith allowed her to move mountains, as Jesus says. And she did. She did great things. She was open to God's will in her life."

In her visions, Mary called her to catechize children, so Brice gave her life to the vocation of education. She wore a habit but was never consecrated as a religious sister. Instead, as a laywoman, she dedicated her life to teaching children the Catholic faith.

"As soon as she experienced the Blessed Virgin Mary speaking to her, her life was transformed and she went immediately away and for the rest of her life [was] teaching children, caring for children, preaching the Gospel without letting up, often with great poverty, with fire, with famine, with poverty, but with enormous faith," Girotti said. "She kept going. And I think that's a powerful witness to us today to keep the faith and to share it."

After building a chapel and a school in the area where Our Lady appeared, the community would experience a night that Stephens described as "like the Battle of

Jericho."

In 1871, as a fire closed in around the property, Brice and others in the community came to pray.

"They just prayed the perimeter of the property where they had a fence set up and the fire burned up to the fence, but it burned around the chapel itself," Stephens said. "The chapel and the school were spared, and it rained the next morning."

Stephens called the shrine "a prayerful place."

Visitors range from devout Catholics to non-Catholics to people who have been away from the Church for a while, and Stephens said he hears lots of "very sincere confessions."

The shrine has seen "little physical healings" and "moral healings," Stephens said, including one woman who was cured after 15 years of painful migraines.

An American saint

As the 250th birthday of the United States approaches, Stephens said it is "really exciting for an American to become a Servant of God."

"Our Catholic identity should form how we live as Americans, and they can very much go together," Stephens said. "And so this is an exciting thing to have one of our fellow countrymen



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

recognized as one who loved God radically and tried to live heroic virtue. We should try to imitate her so that we can live well as Americans."

Ricken said he hopes this is part of a move toward uncovering more American saints. He noted that Pope Benedict XVI had urged the Church in the U.S. to begin the process of investigating sainthood causes.

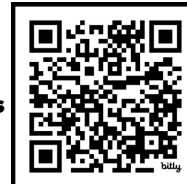
"We knew that there had to be saints here, but we hadn't, as a Church in the United States, taken the initiative to really take this adventure and go into it," Ricken said.

The prayerful event announcing her cause drew lots of young families, according to Ricken.

"It was so beautiful to see all the young families here," Ricken said at a press event after the decree. "I thought that was tremendous, especially since Adele was all about children."

"[The] Blessed Mother told her to go out to this wild country and teach the children what is necessary for the faith," Ricken said. "And she's still doing that, obviously, because it happened tonight where all these young children and families came."

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EWTN News



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Mary, the Queen of Heaven, still hard at work in Northeast Wisconsin



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION CELEBRATES 15 YEARS SINCE APPARITION APPROVAL

BY WILLIAM VAN DE PLANQUE | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION — Bishop David Ricken came to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion to celebrate Mass for the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Monday, December 8, 2025.

The day also marked the 15th anniversary of Bishop Ricken’s announcement of the approval of the apparitions that took place in 1859, making Champion the site of the only Church-approved Marian apparitions in the United States.

Bishop Ricken, the main celebrant of the Mass, was joined by other diocesan

priests and the Fathers of Mercy, who have served at the shrine since 2011.

Following the Mass, Fr. Anthony Stephens, CPM, who serves as the rector of the shrine, recalled Bishop Ricken’s televised announcement of the apparition approval in 2010.

“I remember watching Bishop Ricken from the pulpit making that announcement about the apparition,” Fr. Stephens said. “I thought to myself, ‘Boy, that’s really special for the United States of America to have this approved apparition site, the only approved apparition site here in the United States,’ and then I thought, ‘It would be kind of neat to serve there.’ God is good.”

Fr. Stephens spoke for all the Fathers of Mercy priests at the shrine when he expressed his gratitude to Bishop Ricken for the gift of serving the thousands of pilgrims who visit each year.

“So many of you have asked for this in one way or another,” said Bishop Ricken, on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 2010. “I regard this also as a simple declaration in that it already states what has been going on here so quietly for so many years.”

In 2010, around 10,000 visitors made pilgrimages to the shrine annually. Today, the shrine sees more than 200,000 pilgrims each year.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

During his homily on Monday, Bishop Ricken spoke about the process for approving the apparitions.

“(Going through) that process was a great blessing, but it was also a great responsibility,” he said.

The process involved a nearly two-year-long formal investigation into the apparitions, which three Marian experts were appointed to conduct.

“One of (the Marian experts), the most famous one, said, ‘Most of these that come to me are fraudulent. This one is not.’ Then he said, ‘Good luck,’” Bishop Ricken said.

Bishop Ricken drew parallels between the Gospel reading, which recounted the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Our Lady of Champion.

“Think of all of this that is going on in this text,” he said. “Here in Champion, Our Blessed Mother revealed herself as the Queen of Heaven

who prays for the conversion of sinners. So simple and yet so very profound.

“Can you imagine that? It’s still so rich for me to meditate upon because the Queen of Heaven touched down right here... So think about that for a moment.”



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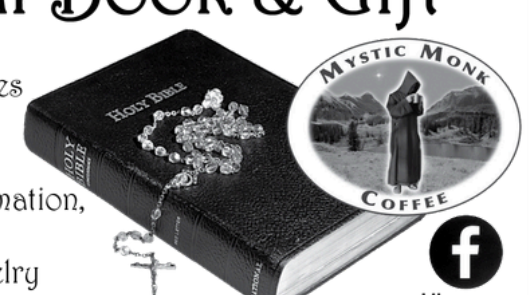


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'Catholic Saints of America' event celebrates America's 250th birthday



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

BY KATIE YODER | FOR OSV NEWS

(OSV News) — Drawing inspiration from St. Carlo Acutis, a national shrine in Wisconsin is inviting Catholics to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States this summer by joining in prayer and learning about the holy men and women of America.

"They founded schools, cared for the sick, served the poor, and witnessed to the Gospel through lives of sacrifice, service and unwavering love for Jesus Christ," said Father of Mercy Anthony Stephens, rector of the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion. "Their example shows us what it truly means to be a faithful Catholic and to be American."

Featuring a special novena

Scheduled for July 1-9, "Catholic Saints of America" will feature a special novena, an exhibit honoring Americans who are saints or on the path to sainthood, and an opportunity to venerate their relics. The relics or remains of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Blessed Solanas Casey and Blessed Stanley Rother will be among those on display.

All this is taking place on the site of the only Church-approved Marian apparition site in the United States.

"First, through this novena and exhibit, we hope people will come to learn about the canonization process," Father Stephens told OSV News.

"Next, we want to help people discover those who may one day be declared saints. Finally, we can help introduce people to a new devotion that inspires them to grow closer to Christ."

'Saints of today'

The novena prayer, which Father Stephens is writing, will seek Mary's intercession for unity, holiness and renewal nationwide. Alongside the novena, the exhibit will feature the stories of holy men and women of America. It will highlight their lives, virtues and legacy, organizers said.

Its format was inspired by a traveling Eucharistic miracles exhibit, which was based on a website created by St. Carlo Acutis, an Italian teenager canonized last year.

"There are fewer than 15 American saints, and only a little more than 70 people whose causes (for sainthood) have been opened" in the U.S., Father Stephens said. "Each of these holy men and women has a beautiful story and powerful example, yet so few people know about them."

'We have saints of today'

"We do not have saints from 2,000 years ago; we have saints of today," he added. "This shows that God is still at work, calling people to himself."

Americans who have been canonized are Sts. Elizabeth Ann Seton, John Neumann, Marianne Cope, Katharine Drexel, Damien de Veuster of Molokai, Junípero Serra, Kateri Tekakwitha, Théodore Guérin, Frances Xavier Cabrini and Rose Philippine Duchesne. St. Teresa of Kolkata was given honorary American citizenship in 1996, the year before she died.

Beatified Americans include Blesseds Miriam Teresa Demjanovich, Stanley Rother, Solanus Casey, Michael J. McGivney, Francis Xavier Seelos and Carlos Manuel Cecilio Rodríguez Santiago of Puerto Rico. Five Franciscan friars known as the Georgia martyrs will join them Oct. 31, and the beatification of Archbishop Fulton Sheen is also expected soon.

Promoters of more than 35 causes

The shrine is in the process of inviting promoters of all U.S. causes to participate. So far, the promoters of more than 35 causes have confirmed they will collaborate in some way. Some will help create their respective exhibit displays, and many will attend in person, Father Stephens said.

(continued)

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While the novena and exhibit take place July 1-9, many of the promoters and representatives of these causes will be present July 3-5. For those days, guest speakers will also “engage with pilgrims, share the stories of these holy men and women, and provide opportunities to learn more about the path to sainthood in America,” said Kim May, the shrine’s event and volunteer coordinator.

Organizers expect that more than 15,000 pilgrims could attend, which would make this the largest event hosted by the shrine.

A special recognition

The exhibit will recognize in a special way the cause of Servant of God Adele Brice, a Belgian immigrant who reported seeing the Blessed Virgin Mary three times in 1859. She is buried at the shrine, which marks the site where they met. The cause for her sainthood opened in January.

Mary, as she appeared to Brice, is honored under the title of “Our Lady of Champion” for the nearby town of Champion, 15 miles northeast of Green Bay.

Father Stephens, who as the shrine’s rector serves as the actor or promoter of Brice’s cause, said the upcoming event will mark the 130th anniversary of the catechist’s death July 5.

Mass to pray for Brice’s sainthood cause

The shrine plans to celebrate Mass that day at 11:30 a.m. local time to

pray for Brice’s cause for canonization and for her continued intercession, he said.

“The afternoon will include guest speakers representing sainthood causes and catechetical presentations, continuing the mission Our Lady entrusted to Adele to teach the faith and lead souls to salvation,” he said.

The shrine will also host a picnic that day. In addition to Mass and speakers, videos and educational presentations will highlight America’s holy women and men.

An invitation to all

The shrine, May said, is entrusting the event to the patronage of Mary under her titles of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patroness of the Americas; the Immaculate Conception, patroness of the United States; and Our Lady of Champion.

The all-age event will include interactive activities for families. The shrine will offer history scavenger hunts, children’s activity pages and more.

“Our hope,” May said, “is that families will come together to celebrate this historic moment, learn about the holy men and women who shaped our nation, and be inspired to grow in faith.”

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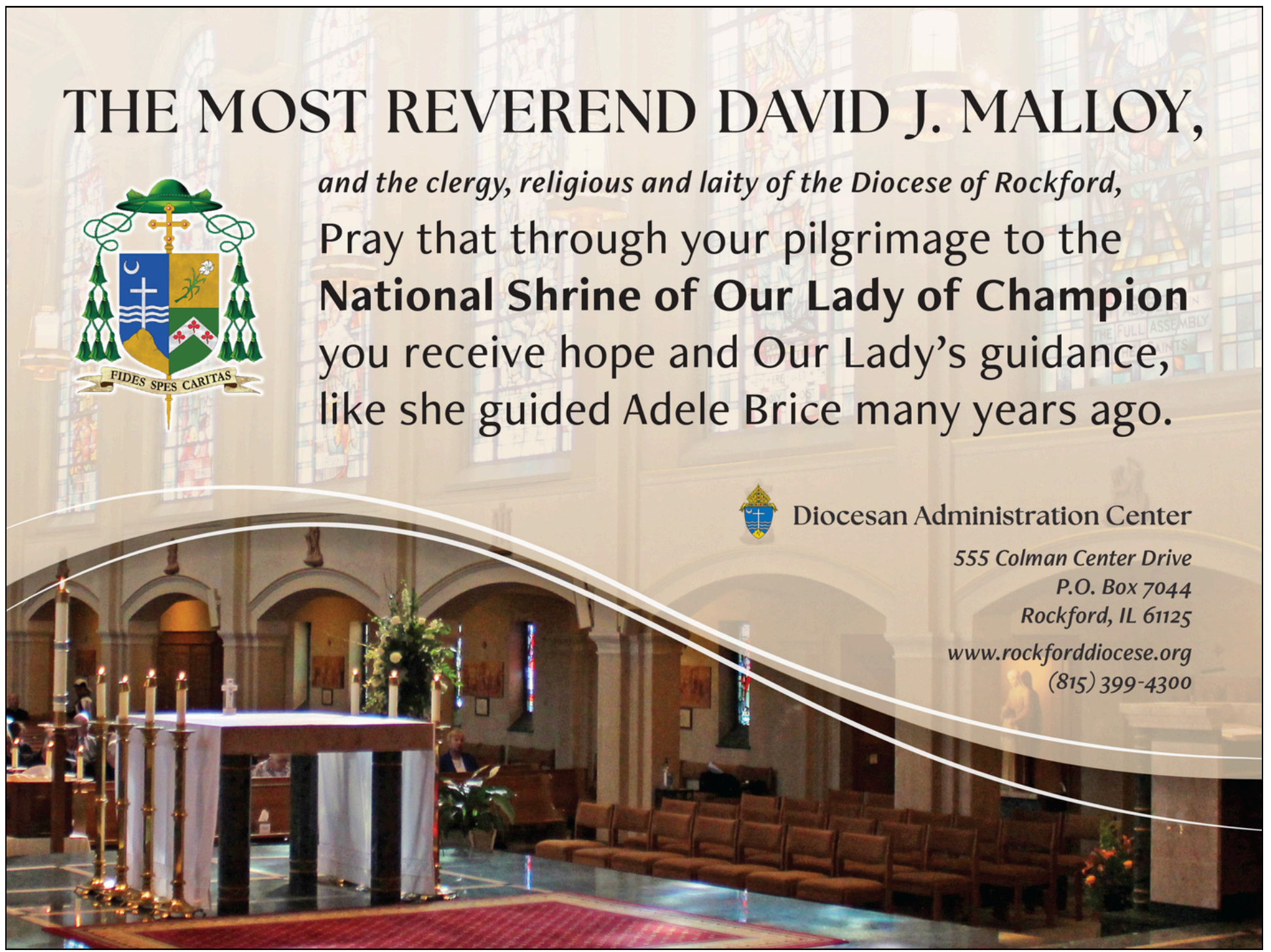
Pray that through your pilgrimage to the **National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion** you receive hope and Our Lady’s guidance, like she guided Adele Brice many years ago.



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At Wisconsin shrine, students encounter Lord through St. Carlo Acutis' example of holiness

BY MARIETHA GÓNGORA V. | FOR OSV NEWS

(OSV News) — Hundreds of high schoolers gathered Oct. 18 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Wisconsin to celebrate St. Carlo Youth Day, which this year included — for the first time since the launch of the youth days at the shrine — a relic of the young saint and bilingual programming.

Throughout the day, around 600 high school students attended conferences and recreational activities, participated in Eucharistic adoration and a procession, prayed the rosary, and attended Mass celebrated by Bishop David L. Ricken of Green Bay. The goal of the day was to awaken hope and help the next generation grow in faith.

A place of pilgrimage

The shrine is the first and only Marian apparition site in the United States approved by the authority of the Catholic Church, making it a place of pilgrimage. The shrine has been organizing youth days, inspired by the example of the holiness of Carlo Acutis — a British-born Italian boy who is the first millennial to be made a Catholic saint — to give young people strength to navigate the world and “reach their true home.”

“Saint Carlo Acutis inspires us all to do extraordinary things, even as ordinary people,” said a post from the shrine’s Instagram account. The post, paraphrasing the recorded words of the apparition, added that the students came to “praise the Lord and encounter Him where Our Lady appeared to Adele Brice in 1859, telling her, ‘Teach the children what they need for salvation.’”

With the firm goal of providing young people with the spiritual strength to “reach their true home” and to find inspiration in the program took place amid moments of deep reflection, praying the rosary and singing hymns.

First shrine youth event since canonization

John Paul Brissette, communications director for the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, told OSV News that although this was the third edition of this event, it was the first time the Carlo Youth Day had been held since Carlo was canonized Sept. 7 by Pope Leo XIV, which was undoubtedly a great cause for joy and celebration.

Brissette explained that, to ensure the inclusion of Spanish-speaking youth, who last year represented almost 40% of the participants, this year’s activities were conducted in a bilingual format.

One of the most moving moments of the St. Carlo Youth Day/Jornada Juvenil para el Santo Carlo was experienced by those present who came to see the first-class relic of the



PHOTO BY SAM LUCERO

Teens during the St. Carlo Acutis Youth Day Oct. 18, 2025, at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Wisconsin.

“first millennial saint.”

“Last week, a priest walked into the shrine and said that he knew we were having this event, and he was in Rome for the canonization. He had met Carlo’s mom, who had given him a relic,” Brissette said.

First-class relic on display at shrine

“She gave him two first-class relics, then he came and made a pilgrimage to the shrine just last week and presented us with a piece of Carlo’s hair from Carlo’s mother. So, (it) was very awesome to have it just in time,” he said.

OSV spoke with Father Anthony Stephens, rector of the Champion shrine, about how St. Carlo Acutis is a model and inspiration for young people today.

“He is important because he is someone who points us to Jesus,” said Father Stephens, adding that Carlo “is not someone who lived 300 years ago, but died in 2006, in our lifetime.”

“He enjoyed some of the same things that the youth enjoy today. But he knew how to look at entertainment and fashion through the lens of Jesus,” said the priest, who noted that he was a young man who “liked video games and was a computer programmer. He was very adept.”

God at work ‘in midst of his people’

For the priest, “it shows that God is still at work in the midst of his

people in the church and he wants us all to be saints. ... It’s possible for young people to be saints.”

Arnol Castellanos Pérez, a Hispanic student and a parishioner at St. Peter and Paul Parish in Green Bay, said that by participating in this event, he hopes to “be an inspiration to bring others to Christ.”

The student said that thanks to Acutis’ example, he was encouraged to grow in his faith and sees in his testimony the reflection of a young man who, despite his illness, lived a happy life thanks to his faith and his love for the Eucharist.

“Another way he encourages me in my faith is the way he lived his life,” said Castellanos Pérez in a video testimony shared by OSV News, adding that Carlo “changed his life through small things.”

Theme permeates talks with teens

Mari Pablo, a well-known Catholic influencer and creator of the bilingual ministry “In His Heart/En Su Corazón,” told OSV News that day’s theme “Hope Awakens” permeated the conversations with the teens.

“We are called to have hope to grow in that virtue, especially in this world with different problems, anxiety, different things that young people experience and we also experience. Hope is not always easy,” she said.

The answer is found when we put our hope in God, Pablo added.

God present even in difficult times

According to her, it is necessary for young people to recognize suffering but also to trust that God is present in the midst of it, accompanying them, and that even difficult moments can bring us closer to his love.

“We are called to be saints. We are in this world, but we are not created for this world, and each of us has a longing in our hearts that can only be filled by God,” she said.



PHOTO BY SAM LUCERO

More from OSV News



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Now Discern This: Mary Says to Pray Like A Champion

BY ERIC CLAYTON | FOR JESUITS

Deep in the Wisconsin wilderness, between a hemlock and a maple, stands a woman in radiant white. She's silent, still and waiting — and invisible to all but the eyes of one young woman, a Belgian immigrant named Adele. The year is 1859.

Adele passes the woman in the woods and wonders at the curious sight. She hurries on. Her family believes the specter to be a soul trapped in purgatory, but Adele is not so sure. She sees the woman a second time, now on her 10 mile walk to Mass.

"In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?" — those are the words the priest suggests Adele speak to the mysterious woman. And so, upon her third encounter, Adele does.

"I am the Queen of Heaven," replies the woman in white. "Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation. Go and fear nothing, I will help you."

Having been given her mission, young Adele Brice sets out to teach about God. She gathers to herself others who desire to embrace this holy task set out by the woman in white. And that mysterious woman? She is better known today as Our Lady of Champion, who in 2016 was designated by the

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops as an approved Marian Apparition and the first in the United States.

I have forgotten all of this, if I've ever known it at all, as I drive along Route 57 north of Green Bay. A sign along the road declares boldly something to the effect of, "The Blessed Mother appeared here! Visit the shrine!" I roll my eyes.

"I bet she did," I mutter. My wife misses the sign all together yet chuckles all the same. But then I get to thinking, I get to remembering. I've recently co-authored a children's book on Marian apparitions; it involved a fair amount of research, a virtual pilgrimage of sorts following in Mary's footsteps all across the globe. The name "Champion" comes suddenly to mind.

"Wait," I say aloud. "I think this is a Marian apparition. I think this is the real deal." But we've missed the turn and have a timetable to keep, and so we travel on.

All the same, I say, "Look it up. Look up Our Lady of Champion." And my wife does, scrolling through the story and the lore and cross-referencing maps. "Yeah — it is," she says. "The real thing. Champion — that's what it's called. And not too far

out of our way."

We decide to hit the shrine on our return trip. Much to my surprise, our girls are pretty pumped about the idea. They stumble out of the rental car, scamper into the quiet church, fall to their knees in some mumbled prayer. They sit and stare and wonder in the chapel beneath the church, the one



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

with rows of flickering candles lining every wall and relics adorning the back. They ask about the relics, why they're

important. They light candles and say aloud people who they'd like to pray for. They scribble names on the scrap paper for prayer intentions.

We wander the grounds. We pause at the gravesite of Adele — "She's the one who first saw Mary," I explain — and we stop at the grotto to Our Lady of Fatima — "I was there, too. Another place where Mary appeared. Cool right?" The girls nod and ask about the gift shop and rush to use the bathroom.

And then we set off again. We're a flight to catch, after all.

I find the image of Our Lady of Champion — this woman in radiant white — standing and waiting in the Wisconsin wilds enchanting. She doesn't move to intercept Adele; she doesn't call out. She's just there. And it takes the young immigrant woman's own curiosity and the encouragement of those she trusts to go before Our Lady. It takes curiosity and not a small amount of wonder for her to be given a mission, a mission to instill in others that same disposition of curiosity toward the awesome mystery that is God.

I think about myself driving by that sign, cynical and focused solely on my task. I think about my sudden spark of

wonder and excitement, my wife's quick-fingered, phone-based research, my girls' unknowing enthusiasm. I think how those ingredients put us on the path to stand before Our Lady of Champion nearly 170 years after Adele. I think about the importance of religious experience, of encounters that pierce the veil and bridge the spiritual and the temporal.

And I wonder: Am I following in that same mission, bringing our little girls to have their own mystical experience of the Divine, an education at God's own feet? I think so.

The Society of Jesus today emphasizes our shared mission to show the way to God. I think this is but one small piece, a trajectory-setting moment. We quite literally allow ourselves to be surprised by God appearing on the horizons of our days, nestled between hemlocks and maples, emblazoned on kitschy signs on the side of the road.

And then, turning with that disposition of curiosity and wonder and awe, we go together to God's own self, still readily appearing, readily available, in the wilderness of our world and the quiet of our hearts. Once there, we let God speak to our souls; we let the Great Teacher show us something new and wonderful of our world and our part therein.

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Celebrating the Annunciation and honoring Mary during Advent

RORATE CAELI MASSES, AN ANCIENT CATHOLIC TRADITION, CELEBRATED ACROSS THE DIOCESE OF GREEN BAY

BY ROY RASMUSSEN | FOR ON MISSION

If you've attended candlelight Mass for Christmas Eve Midnight Mass or the Easter Vigil, you know how spiritually moving it can be to wait in the dark for the light of Christ to appear. The Rorate Caeli Mass, also called the Rorate Mass for short, is a predawn candlelight Mass celebrating the Annunciation as we join Mary in awaiting the light of Christ to come into the world at Christmas. Attending a Rorate Mass or marking time during Advent to celebrate the Annunciation can deepen your devotion in preparation for Christmas.

The Origins of the Rorate Mass: Preparing for Christmas

The Rorate Mass, also known as the Golden Mass (Missa Aurea), comes from a popular Marian Advent devotion practiced during the Middle Ages in Central European countries such as Germany, Poland and Hungary. At that time, Advent combined both joyful and penitential devotions, reflecting practices in different parts of Europe.

Advent was a time of joy in looking forward to the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. But it was also a time of penance in preparation for the Second Coming of Jesus, because Advent coincided with one of four quarterly fasting periods known as Ember Days, as well as a longer 40-day fasting period that began on St. Martin's Day (November 11), known as St. Martin's Lent. This penitential practice also served as preparation for the ordination of priests and deacons during this season.

In the spirit of preparing for Christmas, the Rorate Mass celebrated the Annunciation. In some places, the Rorate Mass was celebrated every

morning before dawn for nine days before Christmas. The Polish King Sigismund I loved the Rorate Mass so much that he built a special chapel to celebrate it daily throughout the year.

While celebration of the Rorate Mass has become less widespread since changes to the Church calendar, it continues to be a cherished tradition in many parishes. Where it is practiced, it is one of the most memorable liturgical highlights of the Advent season.

The meaning of the Rorate Mass: Christ's light comes into the world from heaven through Mary



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

The annual Rorate Caeli Mass at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion took place at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, December 13, 2025.

The symbolism, songs, prayers and readings of the Rorate Mass highlight the Annunciation as the time when the light of Christ entered the world from heaven through Mary. The predawn candlelight setting invokes the image of Christ as the light of the world, who comes into the world to dispel the darkness of sin and death. The Mass is timed to

coincide with the rising of the Sun, dramatizing our anticipation of the Incarnation and the Nativity. Through this symbolism, the creation points us to the Creator: to paraphrase St. Augustine, the Sun reminds us of the One who created it. The Sun points us to the Son.

Our predawn vigil also unites us to Mary's nine-month anticipation of her Son's birth. It recalls Mary's own title, "Morning Star," invoking the image of Venus in the morning sky as the herald of the Sun.

The name of the Rorate Mass is taken from the first line of the opening antiphon, which

comes from the Latin translation of Isaiah 45:8, "Rorate caeli desuper et nubes pluant justum." In English, this translates, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the just." Catholic tradition interprets this passage as a prophecy of Christ's coming.

The Rorate Mass opening antiphon, Epistle reading, Gradual (song before the "Alleluia"), Gospel reading, and Communion antiphon all come from the Ember Wednesday Mass, which focuses on the Annunciation. The prayers likewise come from the Feast of the Annunciation. The Offertory comes from the Fourth Sunday of Advent, which focuses on John the Baptist as the one who paves the way for Jesus. Contemplating this reminds one how the Visitation bridges the Annunciation with the Nativity in the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary.

Celebrating the Rorate Mass

As we enter the building to begin the Rorate Mass before dawn, the church is only lit by candles. We see the priests wearing white vestments instead of the purple vestments typical of Advent, reminding us of Mary's purity, which reflects the light her Son brings into the world.

The songs, prayers, and readings unite us with Mary's anticipation as she awaits the birth of her Son and the fulfillment of God's promise in the Old Testament to send a Messiah who would bring light to those living in darkness. We receive the fulfillment of this promise as we receive the Eucharist, just in time for the rising of the Sun at the closing antiphon. We exit into the sunlight, as we go forth to bring Christ's light with us into the world.

Where to find a Rorate Mass in the Diocese of Green Bay

The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion in Champion celebrates a Rorate Mass every Advent. This year's celebration on Saturday, December 13, was followed by a breakfast and was so popular that reservations were required due to space limitations, so start planning now if you want to attend next year. St. Pius X Parish in Appleton will celebrate a Rorate Mass on Saturday, December 20, at 6:30 a.m. If you can't find a Rorate Mass near you, consider meditating on the Annunciation by praying the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary before Mass at your parish.



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The Assumption of Mary

BY MICHAEL COONEY | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION — More than 3,000 faithful gathered at The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion to celebrate the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Friday, August 15, 2025. The Mass, held at Mother of Mercy Hall, was followed by a rosary procession and picnic lunch on the shrine grounds.

The shrine is the site of the only approved Marian apparition in the United States, approved locally by Bishop Ricken in 2009. In 1859, the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Belgian immigrant Adele Brice, instructing her to “teach the children what they need to know for salvation.” Brice carried out this mission for the rest of her life, catechizing young people throughout northeast Wisconsin. The shrine continues that mission today, drawing pilgrims from across the country.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY

Bishop David Ricken, bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay welcomed Archbishop Jeffrey Grob of Milwaukee, who was the main celebrant for the Mass. It was the archbishop’s first visit to the shrine since being appointed to lead the Archdiocese of Milwaukee last November.

“He is the head of our province, overseeing all the dioceses in Wisconsin,” Bishop Ricken said. “This is his first visit, as you already heard. I would also like to say to the archbishop, since I know him so well, that it’s truly great he is here — and not only that, his mother is here with him.”

Archbishop Grob, ordained in 1992, grew up in Wisconsin on a farm in Cross Plains. In his homily, he expressed gratitude for the invitation and reflected on the beauty of the shrine and its mission.

“A word of thanks to Bishop Ricken for the opportunity to be here,” he said. “It’s my privilege. It gets me out of the big city, and it’s nice to be among open lands and open fields. The corn crops look good; this is the kind of weather corn loves. You can almost watch it grow with the rain, humidity, and all those practical things. May we grow as well, as successfully as the corn in the fields.”

He spoke of the images of Mary seen in sacred art and apparitions worldwide, including Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe — and in Champion, Wisconsin.

“She is almost always depicted beautifully and wholly,” Archbishop Grob said. “But there’s a danger in portraying her as somehow remote. My first opportunity today to visit the Chapel of the Apparition confirmed that this is not a place of remoteness. It is a place of close proximity. You walk into this space, sit before the image of Our Lady, and allow her to envelop you, place her mantle around you, and embrace you in love.”

Reflecting on the Assumption of Mary, Grob reminded the faithful that Mary remains a model of discipleship.

“This ‘sleeping with Mary,’ this Dormition — what we call the Assumption, reminds us that she is our model for living out the Gospel call,” he said. “She gives us a pattern to guide our daily lives: ask and act. Isn’t that what we are called to do?”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY



PHOTO BY MICHAEL COONEY

Pilgrims said they were deeply moved by the gathering.

“Just being here with thousands of people filled with the Holy Spirit, you can feel the joy and the peace,” one visiting priest said. “To be in this place that Our Lady appeared — the only approved apparition site in the

United States, it’s just amazing.”

Bishop Ricken called the liturgy “one of the most well-attended Masses in our history,” and said the shrine remains “a little oasis of deep peace here in Door County, where Mary continues to lead God’s children to her son Jesus.”



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Belgian wayside shrines offer road signs of devotion

CHAPELS BUILT BY BELGIAN IMMIGRANTS DOT BROWN, DOOR AND KEWAUNEE COUNTIES

BY PATRICIA KASTEN |
FOR ON MISSION

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 fountains for blessing. Many have guest books 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



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.

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 Schöpflöffel 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 Brice'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: fishaters.com; wikipedia.org; nregister.com; waysideshrines.org and walloonbelgiansdoorpeninsula.weebly.com



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Doug Taylor-Weiss and Michael Miller collaborate to create 'The Champion Hymn'

BY WILLIAM VAN DE PLANQUE | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION, WI — “The Champion Hymn,” a new hymn created in honor of Our Lady of Champion, debuted at the annual Solemnity Mass at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion last Thursday, October 9, 2025.

Bishop David Ricken was the principal celebrant of the Mass, marking the third year that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been celebrated and recognized under the title, “Our Lady of Champion.” Fr. David Wilton, superior of the Fathers of Mercy of Kentucky, concelebrated the Mass among other religious and diocesan priests.

The worship aid for the Solemnity Mass read: “Composed for the glory of God, ‘The Champion Hymn’ is dedicated to the pilgrims who visit the Shrine.”

The hymn was written by Doug Taylor-Weiss, a Catholic convert and former Episcopal minister, and composed by Michael Miller, the director of sacred music for the Diocese of Green Bay.

“A year or so ago, we started talking about how beautiful it would be to have a hymn to Our Lady of Champion,” Miller said. “Everyone agreed it was a good idea, but we didn’t really get down to the business of it until this summer.”

Taylor-Weiss and Miller have known each other for about seven years and have collaborated on hymns on multiple occasions. They met when Taylor-Weiss moved from Auburn, New York, to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2018.

At the time, the two were involved in music at local parishes, namely St. Paul the Apostle Parish in Grand Rapids, and Taylor-Weiss became increasingly interested in poetry.

“I went through a period then when I decided that I wanted to learn more about how to write poetry,” Taylor-Weiss said.

He started reading a lot more poetry and joined multiple Catholic literary groups in the area. He also studied poetry during his undergraduate studies at Wheaton College in Illinois.

“I think I was just inspired one day to write a hymn,” he said. “So, I did, and I showed it to Michael. He said, ‘Oh, this is great; let me write some music for it.’”

The next time they collaborated on a hymn for their parish, the subject of which was the namesake of the parish, St. Paul. That time, Miller came to Taylor-Weiss with music for which he wanted Taylor-Weiss to write the lyrics.

Following the creation of the hymn for St. Paul the Apostle Parish, Miller left Grand Rapids and came to Green Bay to work for the Diocese of Green Bay.

Taylor-Weiss and Miller kept in touch throughout the years. This past spring, while Taylor-Weiss was in the hospital shortly after undergoing surgery to remove cancer, he received a call about a new hymn project.

“I’m in the hospital recovering, and I get a call from Michael Miller,” he said. “I just said to him, ‘I’m in the hospital; I had cancer.’ He was like, ‘I’ll call you back.’”

About a month later, when Taylor-Weiss had fully recovered, Miller called him to share the idea of a hymn for the National Shrine of Our Lady of

Champion and the intention for him to write it.

“Our desire was to have a hymn that drew upon the history of the Shrine in a way that those who sing will be drawn into the spiritual realities that have and continue to unfold there,” Miller said.



PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NSOLC FROM SOLEMNITY EVENTS

“I felt like I’m not worthy to do this,” Taylor-Weiss said. “I’m more of a hobbyist poet... But on the other hand, when you are called to do something, you should do it.”

He had been to the Shrine only one time, a few years earlier, making a short afternoon visit on a family vacation in Wisconsin.

“I said to Michael, when he called, ‘I’ve got to go back,’” he said. “I need to have a much deeper appreciation for this.”

Having done quite a bit of writing and brainstorming, Taylor-Weiss made his second visit, a much longer one, to the Shrine in July 2025.

“It was kind of scary,” he said. “I (didn’t) quite know what to expect or what I’m going to get out of that.”

Taylor-Weiss decided to go to the Shrine without expectations and open himself up to what the Lord had for him there, he said.

“That enormously helped and gave more fuel to the fire so I could finish this hymn,” he said. “The

pieces just kind of began to fall into place. I began to see clearly what I needed to do.”

Taylor-Weiss typically begins the hymn- or poem-writing process with a single line. The first line of “The Champion Hymn” was the line that came to him first.

The opening line of the hymn reads: “Mirror of the Resurrected, you reflect the Savior’s face.”

“In the last year or so, I’ve been really attracted to this idea of God’s face,” he said. “I’ve just been seeing it everywhere in Scripture... I think we should all be mirrors of God’s face. We’re made in the image of God. To mirror God is to be like a mirror looking at him and him looking at us in love and have him reflected in us. I thought, ‘For whom is that more true than the Virgin Mary?’”

At this year’s Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion Mass, the texts from the Mass of the Solemnity of the Queenship of Mary were used. These texts were used because on October 9, 1859, Mary revealed herself to Adele Brice as the Queen of Heaven, Bishop Ricken said.

“I know that some people fear getting too caught up in Marian devotion and not going directly to Jesus,” Bishop Ricken said during his homily at the Solemnity Mass. “I would like to assure you that if you are beholding the face of Mary and honoring her in prayer, her only purpose and always her goal — even as the Queen of Heaven — is to reflect, to mirror Jesus Resurrected to you and to lead you closer to him.”

Taylor-Weiss was born and raised in Grand Rapids. After graduating from college, he was ordained an Episcopal minister in Chicago and served at Episcopal parishes in Dayton, Ohio, and Auburn, New York, where he lived for over 20 years. It was during that time in New York that he became Catholic.

“I, over a long period of thought, eventually drifted closer and closer to the Catholic Church,” he said. “I began to be more and more attracted to certain Catholic doctrines and eventually just began to believe that the Catholic Church was the true Church.”

“I thought, ‘If God is really alive, if Christ is really risen and all these things I say I believe, then there should be miracles,’” he said.

He looked at the Catholic Church and realized that “it was all about miracles,” he said. “To become a blessed and then to become a saint, you have to have verified miracles. The infallibility of the pope is a miracle. The Eucharist itself is a miracle. I thought, ‘That’s interesting. There is this church around that believes in miracles.’”

He took an early retirement from Episcopal ministry in 2014 and entered into full communion with the Catholic Church in 2016 in New York state.

This year’s annual Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion Mass at the Shrine drew thousands to participate in the celebrations. These began with the Memorial of Our Lady of the Rosary on Tuesday, October 7, followed by presentations of the historic Peshtigo Fire from the Belgian Heritage Center the next day.

“Mary is drawing her children here to Champion to experience her presence, her love for them, and to have a respite from the difficulties and trials of their lives in this world today,” Bishop Ricken said.

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The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail Against Small-town Devotion



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

BY HALLE BERANEK | FOR ON MISSION

Each year, The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion hosts a reading of Father Peter Pernin's account of the Peshtigo Fire and the miracle at Champion amidst the blaze. To Father Pernin, the salvaged holy land surrounding the small Robinsonville (later named Champion) chapel was "an emerald island amid a sea of ashes," but I always wondered what connected the miracle at Champion to the lesser known miracle in Peshtigo during the same catastrophic blaze. Why would Father Pernin leave his flock in Peshtigo, the epicenter of destruction, to record the story at Champion and what connection is there between the miracles, Father Pernin, and Servant of God Adele Brice?

It turns out that just two years before the fire, Fr. Pernin was assigned at St. Joseph parish in Robinsonville and was pastor to Sister Adele where he knew and had developed an admiration for Adele's vision in the woods. Father Pernin's next assignment was at St. Mary parish in Peshtigo when the

fire broke out. This connection is where we find insight into the miraculous salvation amidst the destruction of the Peshtigo Fire.

I grew up in the northwoods of Peshtigo, 50 minutes north of Green Bay, and was no stranger to the epic small-town tale of the fire that ravaged 1.5 million acres and claimed upwards of twenty-five hundred lives—the largest in United States history—but was conveniently forgotten from the annals of American history because it coincided with the day of the Great Chicago Fire. Every summer the town's Peshtigo Fire Museum would open and volunteers would share their dappled history of fire accounts while St. Mary Parish in Peshtigo had its own dappled history to tell.

The parish's bold claim to fire history centers on its quaint oak tabernacle painted with a white lacquer. This unassuming tabernacle, containing the Blessed Sacrament, was thrown into the Peshtigo River in the hope that it might survive. Against all odds and a blaze so great, that the world in its wake was

unrecognizable, this white tabernacle arose from the ashes three days later, as a beacon of hope amidst hellish devastation.

The most detailed account that remains of the Peshtigo Fire was written by Father Pernin, the pastor at St. Mary's Parish in Peshtigo during the time leading up to and following the fire, and it is the source from which I have drawn most of my information. In the midst of the fire, Father Pernin's account is as such:

It was about seven o'clock in the evening on October 8 when Father Pernin, who saw the Peshtigo River as the only place to go for refuge from the fire, entered St. Mary's church to retrieve the Blessed Sacrament, but in his hurry, he lost the key to the tabernacle. Rather than leave his Lord to ignite in the blaze, Father Pernin took the entire tabernacle in his hands as he ran from the sacristy to his awaiting wagon. Enroute to the river, Fr. Pernin recounted that his frame of mind in which he found himself was providential, maintaining his courage through the passion he was about to endure and veiled him from the horror and danger he was to undergo. Without this grace, Father Pernin likely would have perished in the blaze and the Blessed Sacrament along with him.

After much toil, Father Pernin reached the river surrounded by an ascension of flames into a hurricane of fire. As far as the eyes could see, people stood on the riverbank staring up at the orange heavens, mouths agape and tongues protruding like souls on the river Hades. The great number of people on the riverbanks had no thought to

procure their safety by entering the waters as they submitted to their fate by fire.

It was about ten o'clock at night when Father Pernin pushed his wagon containing the tabernacle as far into the waters as he could before he was obliged to enter the waters himself and attempt to save his own life. For five hours, Father Pernin and other townsfolk doused themselves again and again in the water, beating away the flames to save their lives and nearly getting hypothermia along the way.

The blaze began to subside at three-thirty that next morning. Father Pernin and the townsfolk who had survived the night retreated from the icy waters and were overcome with hypothermia. Survivors began calling out for aid and searching the scorched earth for who and what had survived. Father Pernin's

what remained of St. Mary's church and found it completely destroyed, except for the newly erected church bell made of bell bronze which now lay half intact on the ground. It had fallen from the belltower and was half melted by the fire.

If the bell was melted and destroyed, surely the wooden tabernacle was lost in the blaze, but three days after the fire had broken out, word got to Father Pernin that a miracle had occurred. The wagon which held the tabernacle had been blown to the wayside—reduced to cinder and ash. The tabernacle had been swallowed up in a fiery tornado and was spit out. It landed on branches in the river. Everything was an unrecognizable landscape, but the white tabernacle showed like light amongst the darkened and hell-burned world.

Father Pernin left the



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PESHTIGO FIRE MUSEUM

injuries sustained during the fire forced him to take refuge at a Marinette parishioner's home before he could return to Peshtigo to tend his flock.

Upon his return to Peshtigo, Father Pernin investigated

the tabernacle to remain in that place for three days as a sign to all survivors of the Lord's saving arm. When Father Pernin retrieved the tabernacle to say Mass, he forced the tabernacle open, breaking the

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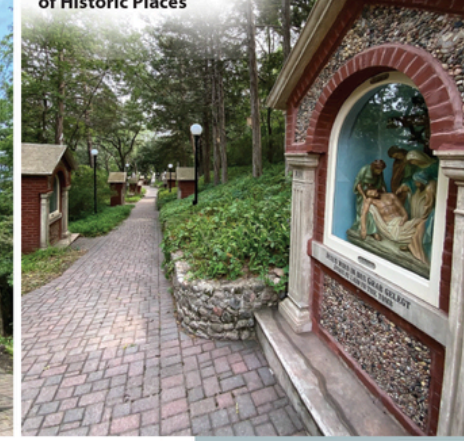
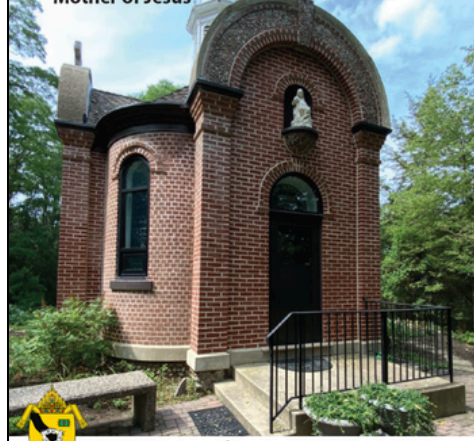
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doors, and saw that the only damages sustained were to the ciborium which had endured minor dents from being thrown around inside the tabernacle. However, the monstrance and more importantly, the host of the Blessed Sacrament remained in perfect condition. The water and the flames respected the interior and the exterior of the tabernacle, even the silky cloth was in a state of perfect preservation.

But, the tabernacle was not the only miracle of God's delivering hand during the hellish firestorm. The grace that Father Pernin recounts being what saved him from the fire and allowed him to save the Blessed Sacrament has also become the foundation upon which pilgrims to the Shrine now know as the Miracle of the Fire. Father Pernin's connection to Sister Adele and knowledge of the apparition at Champion, paired with his talent for writing and dedication to Our Lady has enabled the miracles in the wildfire to become testaments of faith.

The story of these miracles caught on and spread throughout the region with both Catholics and nonbelievers submitted in prayers of gratitude for God's provident hand. Today the

tabernacle sits housed in its parish community up in Peshtigo at the rebuilt church building of St. Mary Parish while the Shrine of Our Lady of

Champion stands as a witness to the intercession of Mary. Together they serve as a reminder of the devastation and hell-fire that reigned down

during America's largest and deadliest forest fire, and tell that even the gates of Hell could not prevail against the body of Christ, enshrined in a

small, oak tabernacle and in the humble shrine with prayers devoted to His holy Mother.

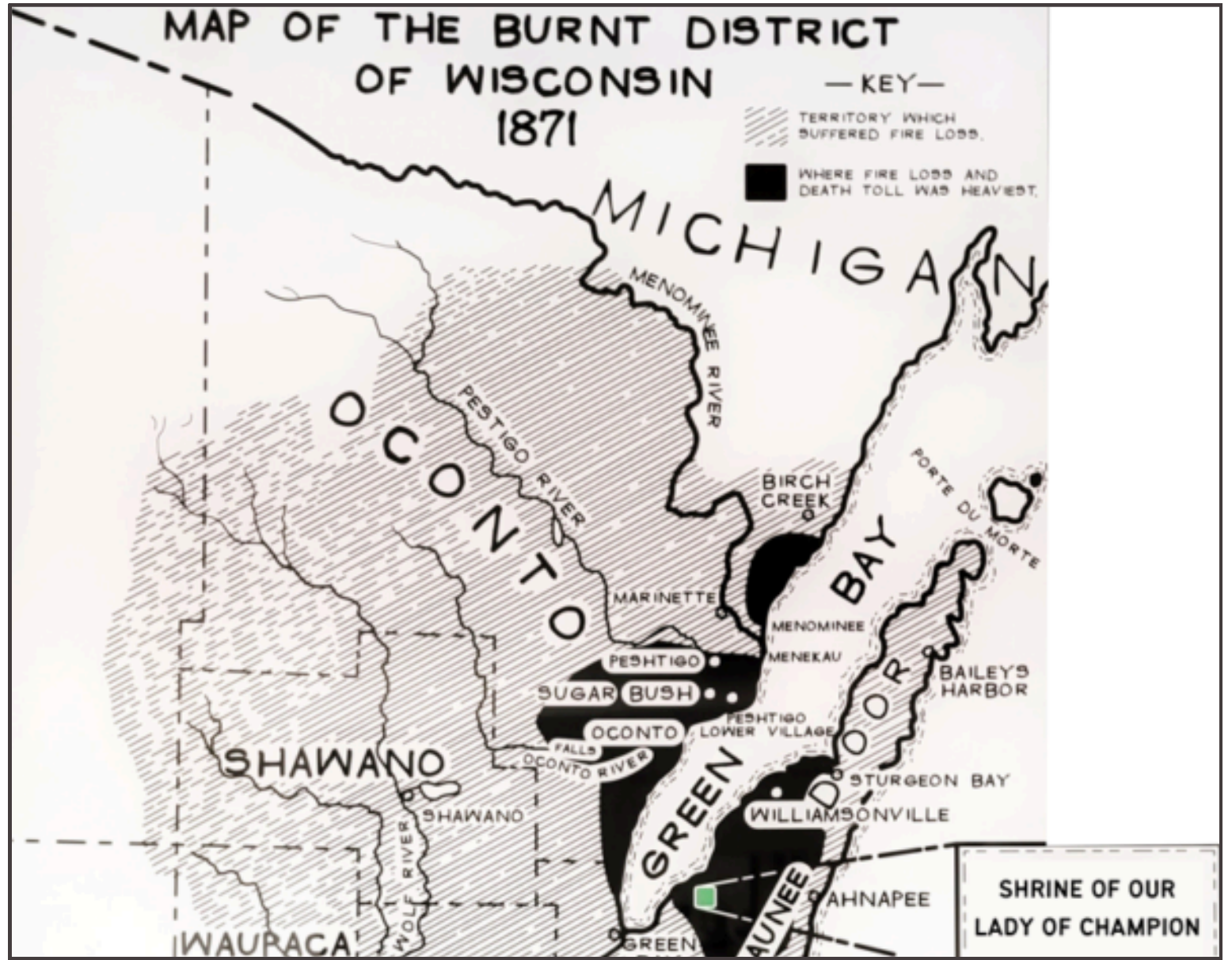


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Cause for Servant of God Adele Brice officials hold opening session of the diocesan inquiry into the apparition seer's life

MEMBERS OF TRIBUNAL AND HISTORICAL COMMISSION, ALONG WITH BISHOP DAVID RICKEN, TOOK OATHS PROMISING TO WORK WITH HONESTY AND INTEGRITY

BY WILLIAM VAN DE PLANQUE | FOR ON MISSION

GREEN BAY, WI — The cause for canonization of Servant of God Adele Brice, seer of Our Lady of Champion, moved forward with the opening session of the diocesan inquiry into her life at St. Joseph Chapel on the diocesan offices campus last Friday, February 27, 2026.

Bishop David Ricken declared Brice a servant of God on January 30, 2026, with the promulgation of a decree to open her cause for beatification and canonization. The Diocese of Green Bay will conduct a thorough investigation of the historical and virtuous aspects of Brice's life. Following this investigation, with the Vatican's approval, the diocese hopes that she will be declared "venerable."

One more step precedes a person's official canonization in the Catholic Church, and that is beatification, or declaring that person a "blessed," which requires a proven miracle.

Friday's historic ceremony, which had taken place only 60 times in United States history prior to last Friday, was marked by oaths taken by officials of the inquiry, including, among others, Bishop Ricken and members of the tribunal and historical commission.

"There's a long, long process the Church uses meticulously with many things laid out before us to

follow," Bishop Ricken said. "The first phase is the diocesan phase. Today, we are appointing the personnel for this particular process at the diocesan level."

The primary role of the tribunal is to interview several witnesses, people who have experienced prayers answered by the intercession of Brice, or people who knew, through Brice's relatives, about her life. The tribunal consists of the episcopal delegate, the promoter of justice and the notary.

Bishop Ricken appointed Fr. John Girotti, the vicar general of the Diocese of Green Bay, as the episcopal delegate of the cause.

"That role is to make sure that the diocesan stage of this process goes smoothly, according to the protocols of the Holy See," Fr. Girotti said. "I represent Bishop. Bishop oversees this entire process."

Fr. Dennis Ryan, a senior priest of the Diocese of Green Bay of over 50 years, will serve as the promoter of justice. Bishop Ricken has tasked Fr. Ryan with formulating the questions that the whole tribunal will ask the witnesses.

"(Fr. Ryan) has a particular gift for attention to detail," Fr. Girotti said.

Tania LeFevre, the executive assistant to Bishop Ricken, will serve as the notary and will assist in interviewing witnesses while authenticating all signatures and documents during the diocesan inquiry.

Other roles of the diocesan inquiry include the postulator and vice postulator, copyist, chancellor, and actor of the cause.

Tammy Basten, the chancellor of the Diocese of

Green Bay, will serve the role of authenticating all official documents throughout the inquiry and the diocesan phase of Brice's cause. Kerry Adam, the vice chancellor of the Diocese of Green Bay, will serve in the role of copyist.

Dr. Peter Murphy, special assistant to Bishop Ricken, will serve as the vice postulator and represent Dr. Valentina Culurgioni, the postulator for the cause in Rome.



PHOTO BY ANDY BOTT

"The postulator is the one who presents the case, representing the actor, and who is the expert on all the technical details," Fr. Girotti said.

The actor of the cause is a role that is not a part of the tribunal or either commission, but it is nonetheless extremely significant.

Every cause for canonization that is opened in

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the Catholic Church begins with an actor of the cause, which is the entity requesting the Church to investigate the heroic virtue and evidence for possible sainthood of the candidate. In the case of Adele Brice, The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, represented at the opening session by Fr. Anthony Stephens, CPM, the rector of the shrine, is the actor of the cause.

After Bishop Ricken opened the ceremony in prayer, Fr. Stephens read from St. Paul's letter to the Philippians.

The historical and theological commissions serve as the research groups of the diocesan phase of Brice's cause for canonization.

The historical commission, of which three of five members were present at the opening session, will work to uncover historical facts about Brice's life.

"(The historical commission) will work to paint a historical picture of Adele Brice during her lifetime and her meaning to us today," Fr. Girotti said. "Theirs is a very important task."

Three theological sensors make up the theological commission, and they will work confidentially and independently of one another, using Brice's writings and testimony about her life to investigate her holiness and virtue. This group will take oaths separately from the opening session of the diocesan inquiry.

"We pray for all of those who accept these responsibilities today to be able to be faithful to the process and open to the truth," Bishop Ricken said in his opening statement.

Bishop Ricken also highlighted an important focus of this cause: the young adults of the Catholic Church, especially young women.

"You know why I think this is (Brice's) time?" he said. "Because she was a young adult woman, and young adult women have a great gift to give to the Church, even today."

Each member of the tribunal and the historical commission, the chancellor and the vice postulator took oaths while placing a hand on the Book of the Gospels and the other over their hearts.

"All of us who will be taking oaths are fulfilling a role that Bishop has entrusted to us, as a successor to the Apostles," Fr. Girotti said.

Bishop Ricken took a similar oath while holding in one hand his pectoral cross, a ceremonial cross worn around the neck by bishops, cardinals and popes as a sign of apostolic authority.

"What we are experiencing this morning has been 130 years in the making," Fr. Girotti said. "Adele Brice went home to God in 1896, and all the while, we believe Adele, from heaven, has been preparing our diocese for this moment."

Bishop Ricken and Fr. Girotti explained to those gathered that the diocesan phase of a sainthood cause alone could take years, but they encouraged the faithful to remain in hopeful prayer.

"Adele persisted and never gave up," Bishop Ricken said.



PHOTO BY ANDY BOTT



PHOTO BY ANDY BOTT



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'A union of the apparitions': Pilgrim Mother statue visit to Champion Shrine sees thousands of pilgrims

FR. JUAN ZÁRATE TALKS ABOUT THE IMPACT OF THE PILGRIMAGE ON THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY OF THE DIOCESE

BY WILLIAM VAN DE PLANQUE | FOR ON MISSION

CHAMPION — Thousands of pilgrims flocked to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion for the visit of the Pilgrim Mother, a life-sized statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, during its residency at the shrine from Friday, March 6, to Wednesday, March 11, 2026.

The visit was one of the many stops on its global tour in anticipation of the 500th anniversary of the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico in 1531.

"What better place for this pilgrimage to come to than the other apparition site on our continent," said Fr. Tim Oudenhoven, a priest of the Diocese of La Crosse who is helping coordinate the Wisconsin stages of the international pilgrimage. "It's such a joy that we have a union of the apparitions of Mary, both at Tepeyac and here at Champion."

Fr. Juan Zárate, the pastor of St. Philip the Apostle Parish in Green Bay, celebrated Mass in Spanish for

pilgrims at the Shrine on Sunday, March 8.

"It is a joy for the Hispanic community to receive the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in our Diocese of Green Bay," Fr. Zárate said. "In the pilgrimages, we see families seeking consolation, young people crying out for a different future, migrants asking for protection, and victims yearning for justice. Each pilgrim on the move represents an act of hope that resists social disillusionment."

Fr. Zárate was born in Mexico City and was ordained at the foot of the original image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe on May 17, 2008.

"For me, it is a great honor to have this image among us, brought from the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, because... at her feet I was ordained a priest," he said. "Every time I encounter an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, I continue to feel the same emotion, joy, and gratitude to God for this heavenly gift."

"I remember that every December 12, millions of people walk toward the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Pilgrims walk wearily, carrying promises, heavy silences, and enduring hopes. In a country currently marked by polarization, fear, and violence, the image of these pilgrims reminds us that Mexico still knows how to walk together."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

Each day of the visit at the shrine in Champion consisted of multiple sessions of the "Pilgrim Experience," where visitors learned about the significant moments of the 1531 apparitions to St. Juan Diego, prayed a decade of the Rosary together, and had the opportunity to approach the statue for veneration.

The week-long event began with an opening Mass celebrated by Bishop David Ricken. Concelebrating the Mass were Fr. Anthony Stephens, CPM, the rector of The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, and Fr. Oudenhoven.

"This is what Msgr. Hernández Díaz, the rector of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, said about this visit: "This veneration experience will awaken a renewed sense of devotion and will build the ties between our nations," Bishop Ricken said at the opening Mass.

"Our Lady of Guadalupe not only represents highly sacred values that give identity to our Hispanic people, of whom she is Mother, guardian, and example, but she is also a symbol of immense value in Latin America, of which she is also Patroness, and recognized as Empress of all the Americas," Fr. Zárate said. "This is without diminishing the immense importance she has throughout the world."

In his homily, Bishop Ricken talked about the similarities between the Marian apparitions in Mexico and those in Wisconsin, as identified by Marian theologian and author Fr. Edward Looney.

Fr. Looney, a priest of the Diocese of Green Bay, also serves as the pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Shawano.

"First of all, the recipients of the apparitions were both young adults; laity, but connected to the Franciscan order," Bishop Ricken said.

St. Juan Diego and Servant of God Adele Brice "pointed to the sacraments," he said.

When Mary, the Mother of God, revealed herself as such to St. Juan Diego, she asked him to build a shrine or a church at the same location so she could show her love to all.

"On Saturday morning, December 9, Mary made it clear why she wanted this new church to be built on Tepeyac," Fr. Oudenhoven said during his talk after the opening Mass. "The first reason was for the unity of races, for the coming together of everybody, as there was massive division at that time."

Our Lady of Guadalupe is "a perfect inculturation of the Gospel," Fr. Zárate said. "Her figure unites cultures, languages, and sensibilities because she speaks the language of the heart. Therefore, even those who do not consider themselves close to the Church find in her a symbol of identity, dignity, and human connection."

"Today, when the world needs bridges, not walls, dialogue, not confrontation, Guadalupe reminds us once again that we are one people, called to rebuild trust and overcome indifference," he said. "Her message is to listen, welcome, protect, and accompany."

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From Doubt to Faith: An Answered Prayer



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OUR LADY BRINGS A LOVED ONE TO OUR LORD: AN ANSWERED PRAYER

BY ROY RASMUSSEN |
FOR THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF
OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

At the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, we hear many pilgrim stories about graces they received after visiting. Some graces are as subtle as a deep sense of peace, and others are as dramatic as discovering a chronic illness is suddenly gone. While these cases are not declared miracles without a long Church process, many personal encounters and graces received bear witness to the work Our Lady continues to do in Champion.

Here is one inspiring report we received from a woman who visited the Shrine. She gave us permission to share it but requested to remain anonymous. In this story, we hear how a prayer to Our Lady to help someone come to know Jesus led to sacramental graces for two people.

Our visitor wrote, "Our Lady is so kind and I have proof that she hears her children and answers their prayers! She truly is the best Mother."

"About five years ago I was entering into the Church and was getting to know a new friend," she said. "This person and I had many conversations about Jesus and the Catholic Church. I was very excited to be on my journey into the Church, but my friend couldn't understand my excitement. He would tell me over and over again, that if they can't see

God, hear God, touch God, it's hard to believe He exists. He needed proof. He wanted to experience God."

Maybe you've been in this situation where someone you care about is having trouble believing in God because they haven't experienced Him personally. What do you do? Instead of relying on human arguments to prove that God exists, our pilgrim asked Our Lady for help:

"One day in February I went to The National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion and asked the Blessed Mother to help my friend know her Son," she continued. "I asked her to allow my friend to have an experience with Jesus. There was nothing remarkable about my time at The Shrine. It was just an ordinary day. I had only been there once or twice before. I prayed, lit some candles, and left."

What seemed like an ordinary day turned out to be an extraordinary, answered prayer. Our Lady wants nothing more than to bring others to Her Son, so She did exactly what our pilgrim asked, in a remarkable way.

"Not even two weeks later, I get a frantic text from my friend," our visitor continued. "We met up in person, and he told me he talked with Jesus." He went on to describe two vivid personal experiences of Jesus he had just had over the course of two days. These experiences convinced him that Jesus loved him, led him to confess his sins, and guided him on how to begin following the Lord.

What would you think if you prayed for someone and they

came back and told you this? Our pilgrim was naturally skeptical at first. But the spiritual fruits that grew out of the experience convinced her that her prayer had been answered.

"I didn't believe my friend," she continued. "But what happened next shocked me. My friend changed dramatically for the better over the next weeks and months. Bad habits stopped and a life focused on Christ emerged. It was like the Lord put my friend on the runway to Heaven and they couldn't be stopped. It was absolutely incredible. My friend was truly transformed and I believed."

This was already an incredible answer to a prayer. But Our Lady wasn't done sharing her graces yet. Our Lord shares His graces through

the Sacraments, so Our Lady brought both our visitor and her friend to the Sacraments of Confirmation and the Eucharist. Our Lady had one more grace to give our story its joyful conclusion:

"My friend and I are now Catholics and were married in the Catholic Church. Thanks be to God and thanks be to His perfect

Mother!"

In a follow-up, our friend adds, "This Easter, God willing,



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF CHAMPION

my spouse and I will celebrate nearly a decade as practicing Catholics. I owe it all to Our Lady. She's the best! I've received many graces at The Shrine."

To which we can only add, "Praise be Jesus Christ!"

God blesses each of us in unique ways, so everyone's story is different. Some experiences of grace are dramatic, and some are quiet. At Mount Sinai, God spoke to Moses and the Israelites in a thundercloud and a pillar of fire and a trumpet blast, but at Mount Carmel, He spoke to Elijah in a whisper. No matter what your experience at The Shrine was like, if you have a story you'd like to share, please get in touch.

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'It Just Stopped': Catholic Camp Credits Our Lady of Champion for Protection From Wildfire in California

"THE FIRE JUST STOPPED AT OUR PROPERTY LINE."

BY VICTORIA ARRUDA | FOR CHURCHPOP

It was supposed to be a summer camp like many others that take place every year at Camp Lolek in Wrightwood, California.

But in September 2024, the place was spared from a huge fire, in what organizers considered a miracle through the intercession of Our Lady of Champion.

The facilities of Camp Lolek date back to 1941, started by the Sisters of Social Service as Camp Mariastella, and were purchased a few years ago by Kenny Lund and a group of people who wanted to keep the place Catholic.

In September 2024, they were rebuilding and carrying out expansion renovations at the site, which houses the Saint Edward Retreat Center during the year and Camp Lolek from June to August for about 150 participants, when the region was hit by a wildfire. But despite its large scale, the flames did not reach the property and left the camp intact.

In an interview with ChurchPOP at the SEEK 2026 Conference in Fort Worth, Texas, Kenny Lund, one of the Camp and Retreat Center owners, explained that the Bridge Fire had been approaching the region with 60-mile-per-hour winds for weeks.

"It came in and threatened the entire town; they, in fact, evacuated all of Wrightwood, and it was coming down our Canyon. They were just about to abandon and give up the camp because we're just all in the woods," he shared.

That's when something incredible happened:

"Miraculously, the fire just stopped at our property line, and it burned all the way around on both sides of us. On the east, west, and the southern side was all on fire, but it didn't come in and touch the camp."

He says that even the firefighters were impressed and couldn't understand what had happened.

"The fire captain said they were just about to abandon, and the wind in our Canyon just stopped. It was like it just was turned off," Lund recalls.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CAMP LOLEK

That's when the fire captain understood the reason behind the seemingly inexplicable event:

"He talked to my daughter, who's our camp director, and asked if they could stay there just in case it flared up again; he said it was the strangest thing. He said the wind just stopped when it hit our property line, and she said, 'Well, we have hundreds of people praying, and praying for the intercession of Our Lady of Champion, who stopped the largest forest fire in the US.' And he said, 'Well, that's what did it because it doesn't make any sense how the wind just stopped and spared your place!'"

With gratitude, Lund added, "And we were open that summer, and we still host 65 retreats, and it is now that we really consider it sacred ground."

Named after Saint John Paul II's nickname, Camp Lolek takes inspiration from this great saint and his love for the outdoors, the youth, and the Virgin Mary.

Our Lady of Champion

On January 30th, Bishop David Ricken of the Diocese of Green Bay formally advanced the sainthood cause of Servant of God Adele Brice, the humble woman who in 1859 witnessed the apparition of Our Lady of Champion, who's venerated for the extraordinary protection attributed to her intercession during the devastating Peshtigo Fire of 1871—the largest forest fire in U.S. history.



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“ 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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