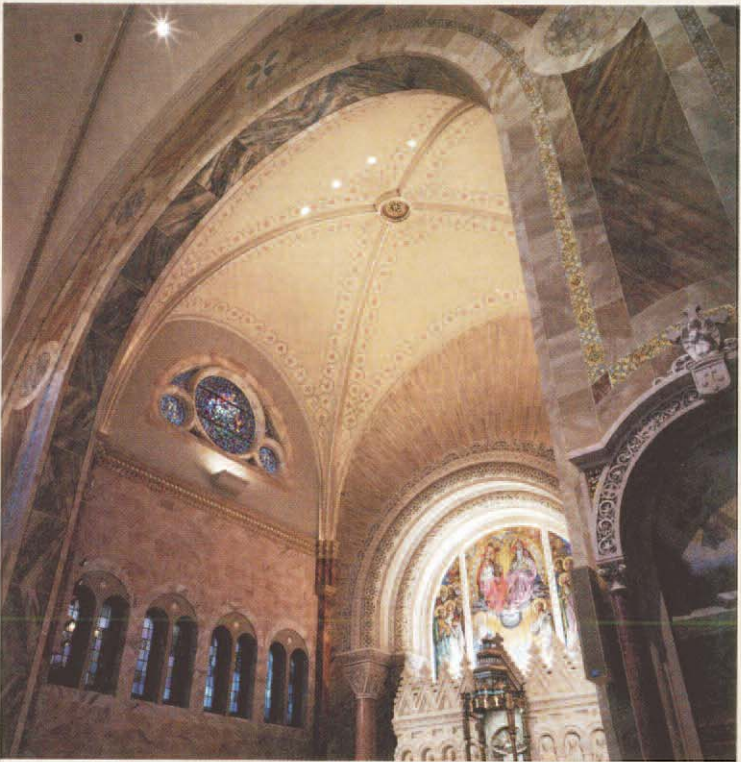
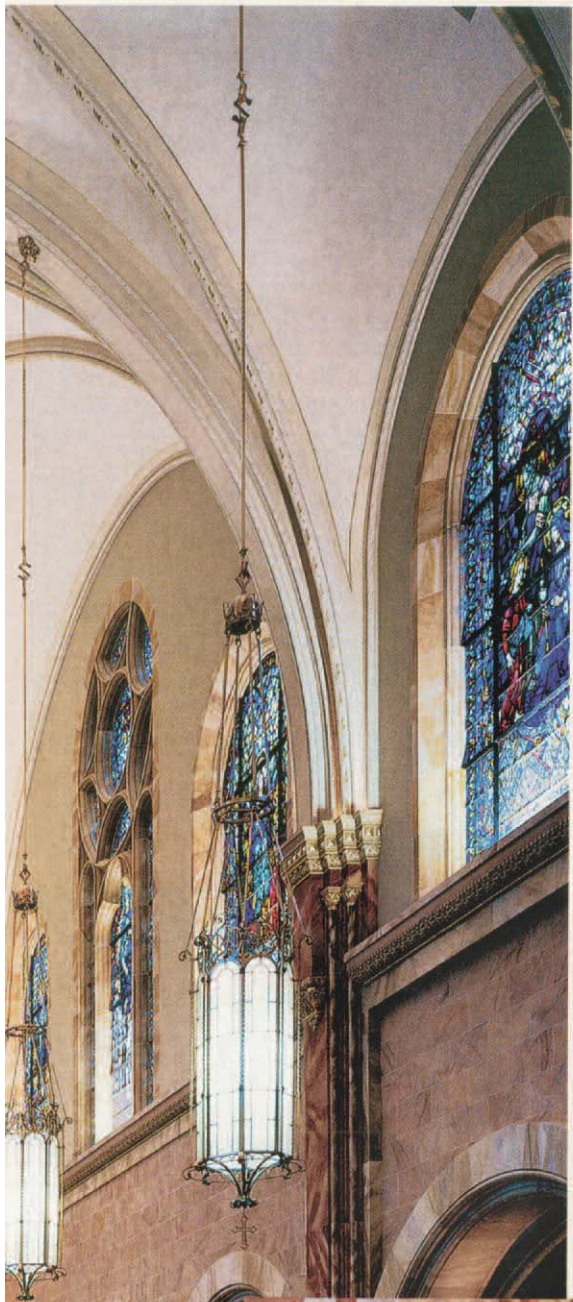


Holy Hill

In A New Light

By Judy Jepson

Two large interior photos by Korom.com, courtesy of Conrad Schmitt Studios. Small interior photo features Archbishop Timothy Dolan (left) and Father Cyril Guise. Aerial photo ©Curtis Waltz, www.aerialscapes.com.



SITTING in a pew in the recently restored sanctuary at Holy Hill, The National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians, located atop the highest peak of the Kettle Moraine, is truly enlightening in more ways than one. Although it has always been a sacred and blessed place of welcome and worship, there's something about the way the sanctuary now looks and feels, since its restoration, that is more awe inspiring than ever.

Years of grime and dullness have disappeared and everything within the sanctuary shines and radiates from top to bottom. The wonderful new lighting, much of it concealed as uplighting, seems to take over your being and automatically lift your eyes, your thoughts and your spirits towards heaven. Glowing

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with spiritual splendor, the illumination of the sanctuary appears as though it's coming straight from heaven...surely, there was a "guiding hand" helping direct this work.

Shrine director Father Cyril Guise, explained that the \$6.1 million of recent restoration work on the inside and the outside of the church has now been totally completed. "First, they had to seal the envelope," he said, "meaning they had to seal the entire external part of the building. This included installing a new roof, new copper gutters and downspouts, complete tuck-pointing and all the windows had to be sealed. The stained glass windows previously had Plexiglas over them, so Conrad Schmitt Studios (well-known Midwest restoration specialists, located in New Berlin) removed the Plexiglas and put laminated glass, with small screen vents, over all the stained glass windows so there's a constant flow of air. The laminated glass and venting will prevent the expansion and contraction of the stained glass, in effect, prolonging the life of the windows."

Throughout the years moisture leaking into the church from the outside had done considerable damage to the interior and once it was determined the exterior was completely sealed and the walls inside the church were dried out, the interior restoration could begin. "At that point Conrad Schmitt came in and everything was taken out of the church, so it could all be polished and cleaned, the walls could be painted and then everything could be put back the way it was." During that time, church services were held downstairs. Father Guise added that while the work was being done, "New lighting was installed, air-conditioning was added and a new sound system was put in place, all of which are greatly appreciated and cause for celebration."

Completion of the restoration work is, however, just one of a number of recent causes for celebration. This year is also the beginning of a yearlong celebration that began this past July to

commemorate the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the Discalced Carmelite Friars from Bavaria, who were invited to come to Holy Hill to operate the facility. Father Guise explained that during Holy Hill's early history, pastors from local area parishes operated the shrine. "But it became a burden for them to maintain their own parish and also take care of this place, so in 1906, the Carmelites were invited by Archbishop Messmer to come and care for the shrine. There were six of them at that time.

"There was a church here prior to their coming, it was built in 1876, and it was a beautiful church," Father Guise said. "That building lasted until 1926 when it was razed to get ready for the present church, completed in 1931." Back then, the Carmelites did all the work themselves at the shrine. Today, 15 Carmelites, among them 13 priests and two brothers, plus a large lay staff, operate the facility and are responsible for the 430 acres of breathtaking wooded hills and valleys that are part of Holy Hill. From the top of the tower on a clear day, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of the surrounding countryside and see Milwaukee's downtown skyline. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation estimates between 250,000 and 300,000 people visit this internationally recognized shrine annually. This includes visitors from every state and numerous countries.

The initial kick-off for the 100th anniversary of the Carmelites arrival was held on July 16th, with Carmelites attending from across the country and around the world. Father Guise noted that other anniversary celebrations include a performance at Holy Hill by the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra to be held December 14th, as well as numerous lectures and presentations.

Another wonderful happening occurred that July day during the Carmelite celebration. Archbishop Timothy Dolan read a fax from the Vatican verifying that Holy Hill's petition for basilica status had been granted. Only a handful of people knew of the forthcoming

announcement and when it was made, the packed church erupted with a gasp of surprise and a standing ovation. It has since been announced that the official ceremony celebrating the basilica status will be held at Holy Hill, Sunday, November 19th, of this year. A dedication of the church's restoration work will also be included during that ceremony.

Father Paul Hartmann, Judicial Vicar for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, was one of those few individuals who knew about the announcement ahead of time. He had helped prepare the materials that were sent to Rome requesting the designation. Father Hartmann explained that, "Archbishop Dolan expressed his desire to seek basilica status for Holy Hill back in 2004. So in early 2005, we did the initial inquiries both at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, their Office of Sacraments and Worship, and also with Rome, with the Congregation for Divine Worship.

"The process included a lot of writing and narratives which Father Guise and the staff and volunteers at Holy Hill put together, as well as a dossier of photographs from almost every angle and all of the significant details—liturgical details, architectural details, the prized or treasured vestments, sacred vessels and more."

Father Hartmann added that some of the forms they were given to fill out were outdated, and had to be redone. But, finally, everything was sent, and the waiting game began. They knew things were moving forward but didn't know when they would get the results and what those results would be—approval or denial of basilica status comes directly from the Holy Father. Father Hartmann noted that a few days before the celebration, they received a phone call confirming the designation, to be followed by a letter. But since they didn't know if the letter would arrive in time to be read at the celebration, Rome agreed to fax a copy to the Milwaukee Archdiocese, so the Archbishop could read it on July 16th.

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"Only the staff in Rome, one or two staffers at the Conference of Bishops and two or three people here knew what was happening," he said. "The Archbishop was able to surprise everybody."

According to Father Hartmann, "What the Holy See considers when it bestows the designation of basilica—a chapel to his Holiness—is that number one, there's historic value, a value reflected artistically and culturally in the notion of the people that have come to the place over decades. Number two, there is truly a sense of spiritual value, as a place of unique pilgrimage, such as our Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, and associated with that there have been expressions of healings and the sense of the miraculous. Then, all of that has to have a present day impact. It can't just be the hollow ruins of a church, it has to be vibrant and alive. So we had to present what is going on in the community it is serving. And, lastly, can it represent a point where the local church and the universal church are connected. All of those elements together needed to be supported with the material we presented."

There are currently only 60 basilicas in all of North America, including Holy Hill. And like most basilicas, Wisconsin's two—The Basilica of St. Josaphat, in Milwaukee, as well as at Holy Hill—have what is known as minor basilica designation. Father Guise noted that, "In Rome there are four major basilicas, and most others outside of that are minor basilicas, even in Rome there are minor basilicas."

Archbishop Dolan said, "Most basilicas—like St. Josaphat on the south side of Milwaukee—are in urban settings, but there are a few that dot the countryside of the world." The recognition of Holy Hill as a basilica is "an honor, a tender recognition by the Pope that this sacred place has been special to the faith and prayer of our community for a long time."

Regarding the official basilica ceremony on November 19th, both Father Guise and Father Hartmann explained there are still details to be

worked out. Neither of them has had the opportunity to attend a basilica dedication before (St. Josaphat was designated a basilica by Pope Pius XI back in 1929), so they are getting details from the Conference of Bishops about proper procedures. Father Hartmann pointed out that the dedication will highlight the connection to the Holy Father and somewhere at an entrance to the church will be the Coat of Arms of Benedict XVI, the pope who designated Holy Hill a basilica. Father Guise noted that a red and gold paneled umbrella will be displayed in the church, symbolizing earlier times when the pope was visiting a basilica and this was held over his head. And there will also be a small bell that announced the pope's coming, and a plaque of dedication to be located in the back of the church.

Numerous dignitaries of the church are being invited ranging from the Pope's ambassador to the United States—to local dignitaries within the lay Catholic community along with civil and secular dignitaries. "This is a worthy recognition not just for Catholics but for the cultural heritage of Southeastern Wisconsin," Father Hartmann explained. He added that Father Guise and the Carmelite Order are inviting representatives from the monastery in Bavaria and possibly from Rome. "It will be a wonderful opportunity for people of all faiths to attend and to understand the church in the midst of history and universality. The program will be a ritualized proclamation of the decree that comes from Rome. Archbishop Dolan will preside and following his reading of the basilica proclamation, there will probably be a sprinkling rite to bless the church."

The name will then officially change and Holy Hill will be referred to with its new designation—The Basilica of the National Shrine of Mary, Help of Christians. Or, as Archbishop Dolan likes to point out, "We will all know it as the Basilica of Holy Hill." The dedication service is scheduled to take place at 2:30 in the afternoon and the general public is invited.

Archbishop Dolan, in summing up his thoughts of what Holy Hill represents said, "Like any church, Holy Hill brings us closer to Jesus, through devotion to His Mother, through celebration of the Eucharist, through conversion of heart in Penance, through prayer and through the preaching of His Word."

Father Guise added, "The mission of Holy Hill is to respond to the needs of the people who come. Some are material needs and, of course, there are spiritual needs, others need a sense of counseling. People of all age groups come and we respond sacramentally to the needs of the people. The pressures of society make a place like this very valuable. It's like an island in the midst of all the violence and tragedy going on around. We try to reach out to the people coming and help them... Holy Hill is like a beacon of hope." It is truly a light for all to see.

For further information on Holy Hill, times of weekly services or details on the November 19th celebration, call 262/628-1838 or visit www.holyhill.com. ■

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