

A Vision

The Introduction

At about the same time, in 1993, four people were inspired, each in different ways and in different places, to build a chapel for travelers of the road and of the spirit. All four of the individuals were Catholic, but only two were previously acquainted. A priest in his early years of priesthood felt God was telling him to build a roadside chapel. A woman, wife and mother, was inspired after a visit to the Cooper Chapel in Arkansas designed by architect Fay Jones. Two architectural partners discovered inspiration "on the job".

Possessed with only the vision and lacking the supplies, talent, and land, the priest prayed for guidance and resources to make the vision a reality. The reality started to emerge when the woman approached him at a reception and proposed that he build a chapel like the one she admired in Arkansas. As if they had tapped the same phone line from God, the two strangers joined to take steps in a bold direction in order to make the chapel a reality in Nebraska.



Site imagined on the return trip from Lincoln



Cooper Chapel by Fay Jones in Arkansas

In the meantime, the architect and landscape architect attended a lecture by Fay Jones in Lincoln, Nebraska. Captivated by the simplicity of the man and his chapels, they were inspired to build a similar chapel in Nebraska. Both fantasized a chapel in the hills along the interstate as they drove back to Omaha.

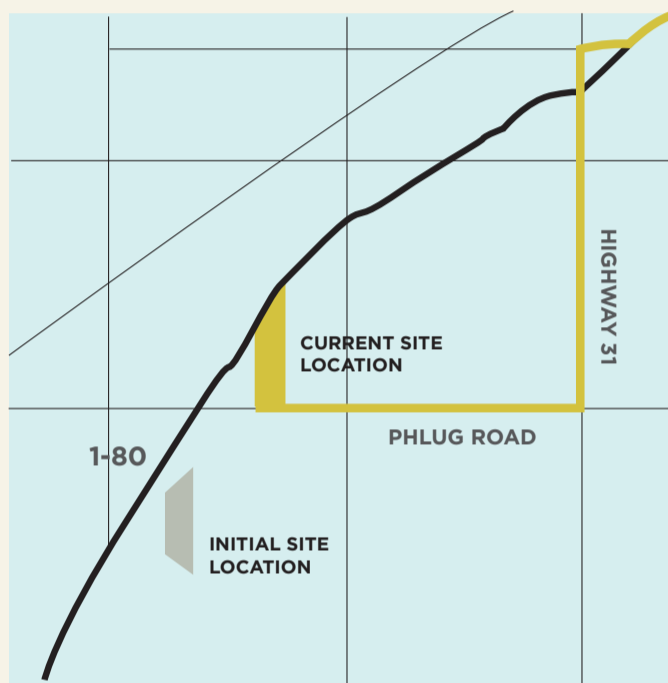
The next week, the architect and priest met through a common friend and discovered the presence of the same divine inspirations. Discovering and developing their faith, the four individuals possessed an innocent gratitude and wanted to give back in sincere appreciation for what God had given them.



The Land

Several meetings and two years later, the group of four expanded to seven and spiritually grew together. They were now motivated to find property. The architect and the landscape architect concluded after research that the best location would be a mile south of the current Holy Family Shrine site. God had a better site in mind.

After an initial refusal by the first site owner, the group decided to appraise the land and present an offer that could not be denied. Surprisingly, they found a building permit on the fence post signifying the land was being developed. The architect followed his curiosity to the county and inquired about the status of the land. The inquiry led to a misunderstanding regarding the location of the desired property. As a result, the group was led to the current site, God's choice.



Aerial view of the initial and current site

Excited to obtain the site recently offered, the group faced a new challenge—funding the purchase. In addition to the miracle of finding the land, the group was blessed with another when the seller requested to option the land and allowed it to be purchased the following year to reduce his tax burden.



Site before building looking north



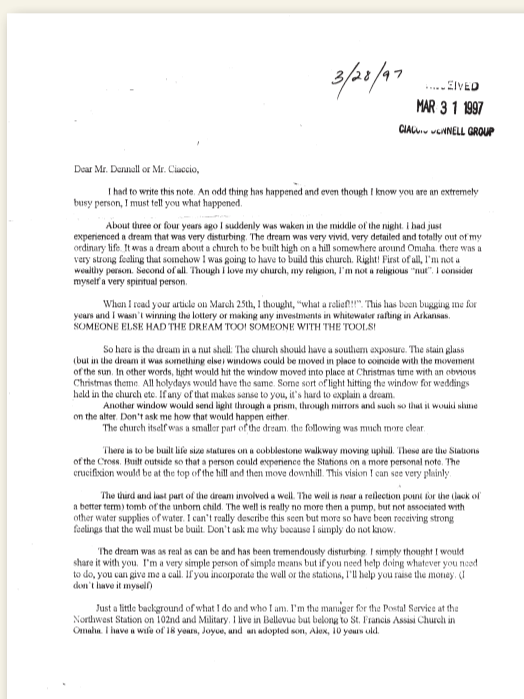
Site before building looking south

Over the year, the design was developed and the vision was shared with many. In the final month of the purchase option the vision touched a man who felt "the vision read like a prayer." As a result, he funded the entire purchase. He would be the first of many individuals to answer the call of the Holy Spirit and give without condition to assure God's will be done.

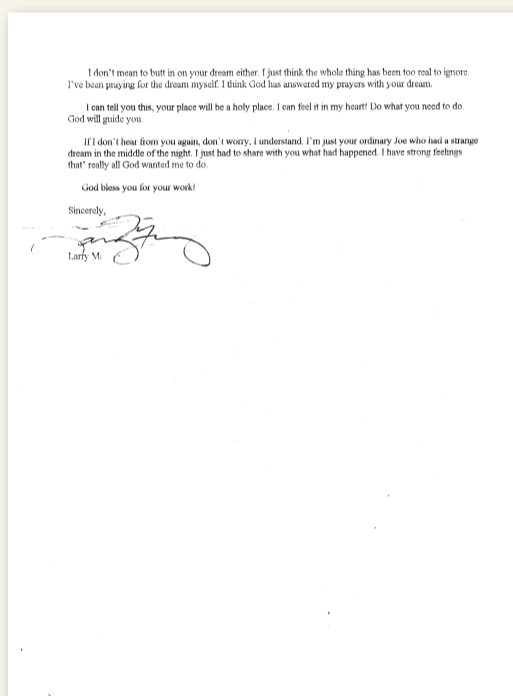


The Design

The group and the project went under intense spiritual building after the purchase in 1995, but the construction of the project stood still. The question of the design being human will or God's will withheld the project for a couple of years until the Omaha World Herald discovered and published the story moving in a 1997 edition. A letter from a responsive reader confirmed the design as truly being God's will. The reader had previously dreamt (at about the same time the others were inspired) that he was to build a chapel.



Original letter received



As he described the elements of the dream, it was obvious that God was confirming the intentions of the group and reader. Without previous contact, the two visions appeared to be identical. Cleansed with the confidence that the design was God's will, the project began with the construction of the parking lot and visitor center in 1997.



Visitor Center view from Chapel



Parking lot entrance



Visitor Center foundations



More about the design...

In 1999 enough funding was secured to begin the chapel. All things progressed favorably as the foundations were laid, and fabrication of the structure trusses were completed.



Excitement heightened as the structural trusses were finally erected the last week in July 2000. The Chapel was taking shape, but this would last for a week.



A ferocious windstorm collapsed the chapel in August 2000 and the reconsideration over the next year strengthened both the spirit of the group and the structure of the design. As if God was testing their

faith, the group was forced to die of themselves and be purified in order to continue.

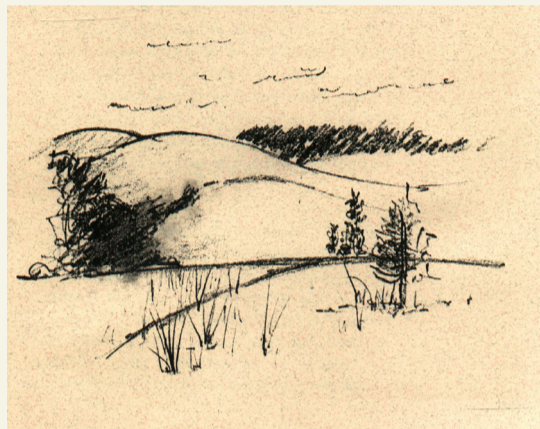
Due to the intricacy of the design, only a three carpenter crew could work on the project. As a result, two and half years were necessary to complete the Shrine. Finally, in July 2002, the visitor center and chapel were opened to the public.



The Mission

The story of the Holy Family Shrine begins with the intervention of the Holy Spirit within a few people. These people are of diverse backgrounds with little chance to meet until the Holy Spirit united them spiritually with the idea of the Holy Family Shrine. Through a unique and divine series of events, the individuals discovered they had been enlightened to the same ideas. The idea was and still is to create a place off of Interstate 80 for travelers to pray and discover the Catholic faith. These travelers are not only of the road, but also of the spiritual voyage on earth.

After two years of searching for a perfect site for the Holy Family Shrine, a site was secured, here in the bluffs over looking the Platte Valley.



The purpose of the Holy Family Shrine is to provide an opportunity for people to discover and develop the Catholic faith; an opportunity without the convoluted influences that camouflage and distort the origin of the Catholic faith.

“Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah. For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the nether world shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.’” Matthew 16:17-20

*It is with this understanding that the Holy Family Shrine intends to reveal the apostolic succession of The Church, the Catholic Church, based upon the Catechism of the Catholic Church that: “The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.”**



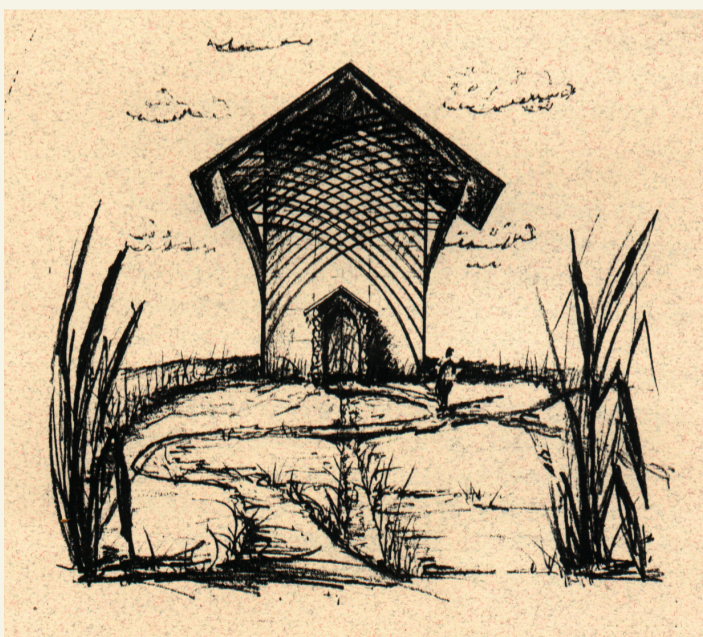
More on the mission...

The Shrine intends to call the desire within the human heart through developments that do not distract, but are complementary to the Holy Spirit. For, "One cannot believe in Jesus Christ without sharing in his Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who reveals to men who Jesus is." It is with premise that the Holy Family Shrine relies solely on the intervention of the Holy Spirit to discover and develop the faith within visitors.*

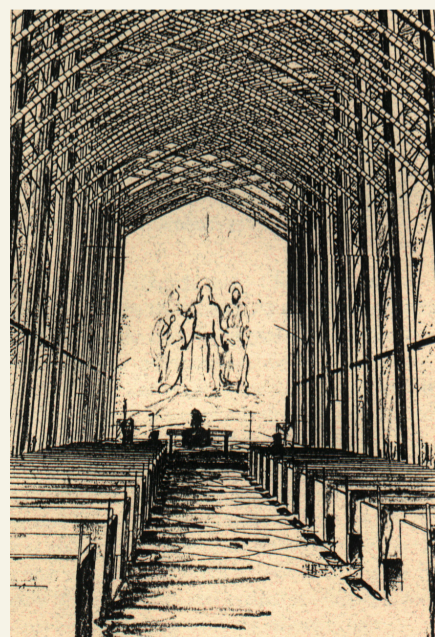
The example of the Holy Family Shrine serves as the example of a model of human life of response to the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the enriched knowledge and awareness of the lives of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph call us to serve in similar ways to do God's will to reach eternal life.

The hope of the Holy Family Shrine is to give those who visit a special experience of the presence of the Lord, something like Jacob has when he awoke from his dream of angels ascending and descending upon the ladder of heaven:

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he exclaimed, "Truly the Lord is in this spot, although I did not know it!" In solemn wonder he cried out: "How awesome is this place! This is nothing else but an abode of God, and that is the gateway to heaven!" Genesis 28: 16-17



The Shrine



Chapel interior

**Catechism of the Catholic Church 27 & 152
Images are from the original concept sketches*



Elements of Design

The Holy Family Shrine is situated on a 23-acre site overlooking the Platte Valley. The **native blue stem prairie** has been reestablished to the original form God presented, before man manipulated it. Likewise, the shrine challenges us to reestablish the godly origin in our lives.



Native perennials highlight the entry and the passage to the chapel, displaying the color of a pilgrimage with the Holy Spirit. The chapel serves as beacon atop of the hill, attracting pilgrims to the shrine. Once on the site, you are drawn to a path cut into the earth exposing a **natural limestone entry**. Transitioning through the **tomblike entry**, we are called to the need to die of ourselves and be filled with the Holy Spirit.



Now inside the Visitor Center, we lose orientation. Light from the center reveals a suspended **sculpture**. This sculpture represents the shroud of Christ as it fell to the tomb after the resurrection. Through its suspension, we are reminded that the resurrection is present today in our lives. Symbolic of the Holy Spirit, water appears with its source a mystery. As the pool fills with water and we with the Holy Spirit, the outpouring leads to the Church, literally and spiritually.



Exiting the Visitor Center, we behold the **chapel entry façade**. Made of Western Red Cedar, the **upper web members of the trusses** interlace like waving wheat in a field. Wheat, symbolic of the Eucharist, is the structure of the Catholic church.



Similarly, the **trusses** support the cedar roof deck 49 feet above the floor at the ridge and 32 feet at the eaves. The arching members of the trusses were cut out of 850 single boards. The columns on one side are an inch and a half out of line from the columns on the other side to allow the arching members to bypass.



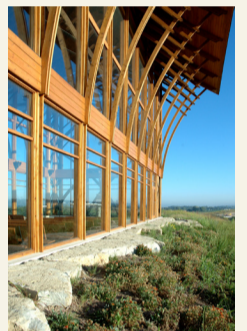
Two to three pieces were spliced together to complete one **arch**. **Splices** occur at a bypassing member intricately calculated via a computer. In fact, full-scale templates were printed and given to the contractor who cut each piece and created, piece by piece, the layout.



Elements of Design

The chapel **sits on limestone** that appears to be eroded an exposed piece of ledge stone atop of the hill. Symbolic of Peter “The Rock” on which Christ built the Church, the limestone continues throughout the floor of the church. Once inside the chapel, water continues to cut through the floor, but splits to each side of the aisle, increasing in volume and velocity. **Limestone bridges** the water allowing those to enter each pew, recalling our baptism. As the **water** culminates to it’s highest beneath the altar, the Holy Spirit reaches it’s height there through the **Eucharist**.

Three members make up each support column, symbolic of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who support our lives. Glass windows between the columns serve as the chapel walls. The **glass** allows the harmony of the God-made nature to interact with the man-made structure, creating seamless beauty.



Integrated in the design are complimentary accessories reinforcing the mission of the Shrine. The **etched glass figure of the Holy Family** hovers like a spirit over the chapel. The 16 feet by 8 foot single piece of glass may be the largest in the United States. Beneath the figure hangs the corpus of Christ from a plinth of stone from which the tabernacle is anchored. The **tabernacle, crucifix, and etching** combine to reinforce the mysteries of the Catholic faith, composed to express the Eucharist as the base of the crucifixion and promise of our eternal union through the resurrection.

The **pews and sanctuary furnishings** were custom designed to articulate the details of the structure. The **light fixtures** are an abstract presentation of the crucifixion. The **tiered metal sconce** represents the ribs of Christ and the wood of the cross is supported by the arms of Christ.

The simplistic and modest design is purposeful to suggest how we may live to obtain the beauty and harmony of God’s will.

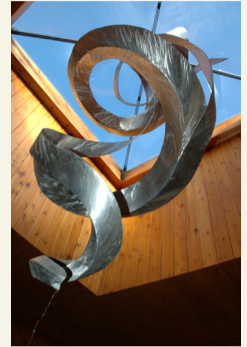


Elements of Design

Practical Facts

The Source of the Water:

Although it appears as if the water flows continuously from the Visitor Center to the chapel, there are really three separate water systems (Visitor Center, Entry Courtyard, Chapel). The Visitor Center is fed from a small pipe on top of the southwest cross support above the sculpture. The Entry Courtyard has an underground re-circulating pump system. The Chapel has a similar re-circulating system under the floor.



Mechanical System:

The heating and cooling is comprised of a geothermal heat pump system, 8 ton water to air in the Visitor Center and 50 ton water to water in the Chapel. The water to water system in the chapel is located beneath the altar. Made up of 10 individual heat pumps, these units exchange heat through a geothermal well system that puts heat into the ground or takes it out via 54 wells 175 feet deep just north of the chapel. Water flows through a continuous pipe that circulates up and down each well. The conditioned water passes through two air handling units (fans) that force air through the air troughs along each side, and returns air through a slot under the altar. Fresh air is introduced through a louver/door to the mechanical system on the west side. This is the only visible mechanics of the system. As fresh air is taken in exhausted air is relayed through the grill above the main entry. In the winter, hot water is passed through a radiant fin tube located in the spandrel between the columns at the heart of the light fixtures, heating the upper glass.

Chapel Dimensions:

Area	1,800 square feet
Length	80 feet 10 inches
Width	26 feet 9 inches
Eave Height	31 feet 9 inches
Ridge Height	48 feet 9 inches

Building Materials:

Veneer and floor stone	Limestone from St. Mary's, Kansas
Landscape boulders	Limestone from North of Omaha, Nebraska
Wood structure and trim	Western Red Cedar
Glass	One Inch Insulated Clear
Pews	Red Oak

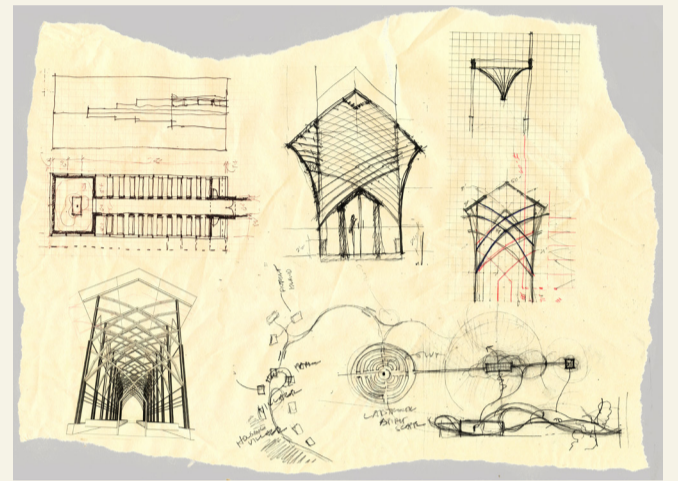


Elements of Design

Practical Facts

Design:

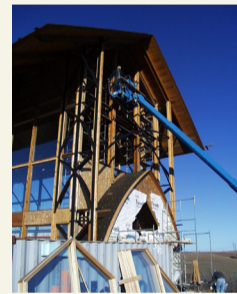
The founding group was able to pool personal talents and resources together to serve as owner, designer, and contractor. Due to the need to be flexible with phasing, funding, and design, this approach served to allow God's hand to be present always and guarded the project against any compromise. While it seemed to take a long time, it was learned that God has no watch or calendar. Starting in 1995 the design was conceived. Working as God's pen, the architects developed the design off and on for seven years.



Serving as master builder, the architect was able to attempt many methods and materials to determine the best choice. Teaming up with contractors to construct the majority of the site and handle general construction, complimented the ability to refine the design throughout the building process. An average of three carpenters worked on the project at one time. This allowed the project to progress at a pace where the designer and laborer could work seamlessly together.

Construction:

The chapel was constructed using a combination of prefabrication and in-place construction. As the foundations and site work were being constructed the steel was fabricated off site. As the steel was delivered and erected on site, the wood arched trusses were cut and fabricated on the ground. At the same time the windows were fabricated and stained off site. The wood trusses were then erected and the wood roof deck and roof were installed. With the structure and roof complete the windows arrived and were installed. Miscellaneous trim and woodwork followed to add the finishing touches.



Landscape:

Prairie Native Little and Big Blue stem

Perennials Black-Eyed Susan

Purple Dome Aster

Blanket Flower

Purple Liatris

Purple Cone Flower



Some Answers

There have been many commonly asked questions about the development and purpose of the Holy Family Shrine. The following is an attempt to answer some of those questions.

Why build it?

Since the inception of the Holy Family Shrine many questions have been asked. Some of them have been practical, some curious, and some philosophical. The most challenging and complicated question has been “Why do anything?” The founders of the shrine faced this question continuously as they encountered adversity and challenges. Although evil demanded equal time, good prevailed. As you are faced with the question “Why do good?” consider the following:

People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered.

Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you.

Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight.

Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, others may be jealous.

Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will forget tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have and it may never be good enough.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

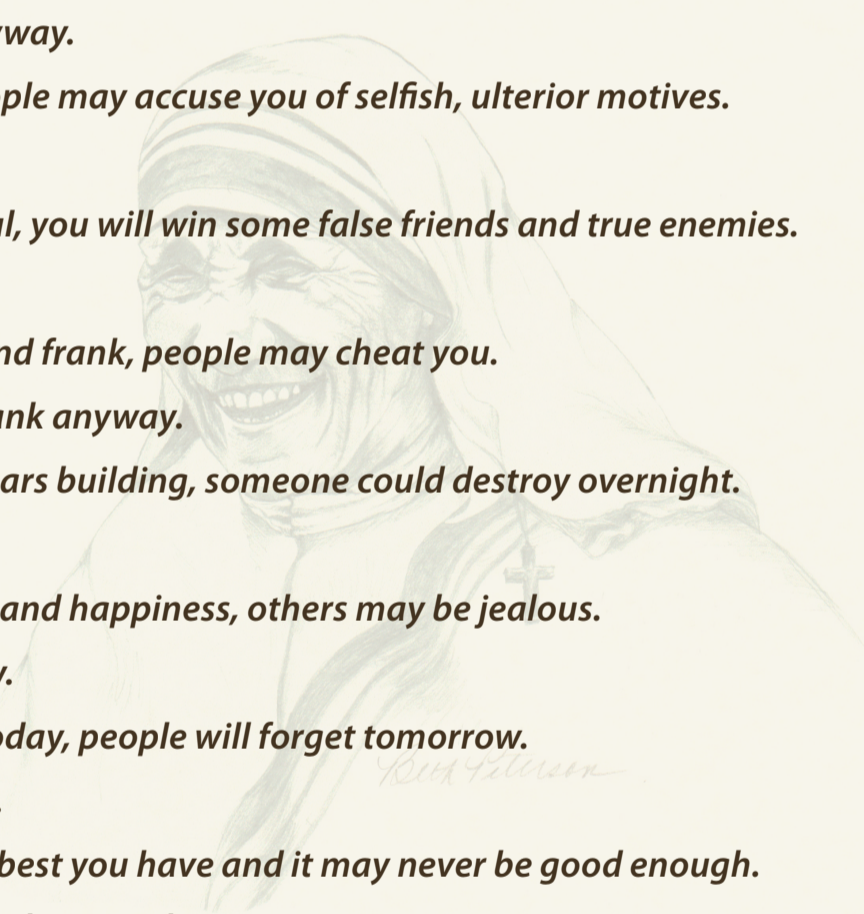
You see, in the final analysis it is between you and God.

It was never between you and “them” anyway.

—Mother Theresa

Why the Holy Family?

The family is the core of our existence and our survival as a society. Recognizing this, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph serve as the ultimate model of family. The Holy Family Shrine strives to give hope in preserving the family. As each family strengthens so does our neighborhood, parish, community, country, and world.



More Answers

What is a Shrine?

A shrine is the memory, presence, and prophecy of the living God. All Christians are invited to join and take part in the great pilgrimage that Christ, the Church and human kind have accomplished and must continue accomplishing in history. The shrine toward which they must be directed is to become "the tent of meeting" as the bible calls the tabernacle of the covenant...

"Shrines are thus like milestones that guide the journey of the children of God on Earth." Pope John Paul II

*They foster the experience of gathering and encounter, and the building up of the ecclesial community.**



Holy Family Shrine

Why make a pilgrimage?

"We are strangers before you, pilgrims only as were all our ancestors."

(1 Ch 29:15) Since the very first moment of their appearance on the stage of the world, human beings have always walked in search of



new goals, investigating earthly horizons and tending toward the infinite... For the Church, pilgrimages in all their multiple aspects, have always been a gift of grace. In the transfiguration Jesus took Peter, James, and

John away from their common place on a pilgrimage in order that God would reveal His Son. "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud cast a shadow over them, then from the cloud came a voice that said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" Matthew 17:5 Similarly, may we come from our common place to this place for Christ to be revealed.

*Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People: "The Shrine"

