

CHAPTER THIRTEEN: WINSLOW, AR

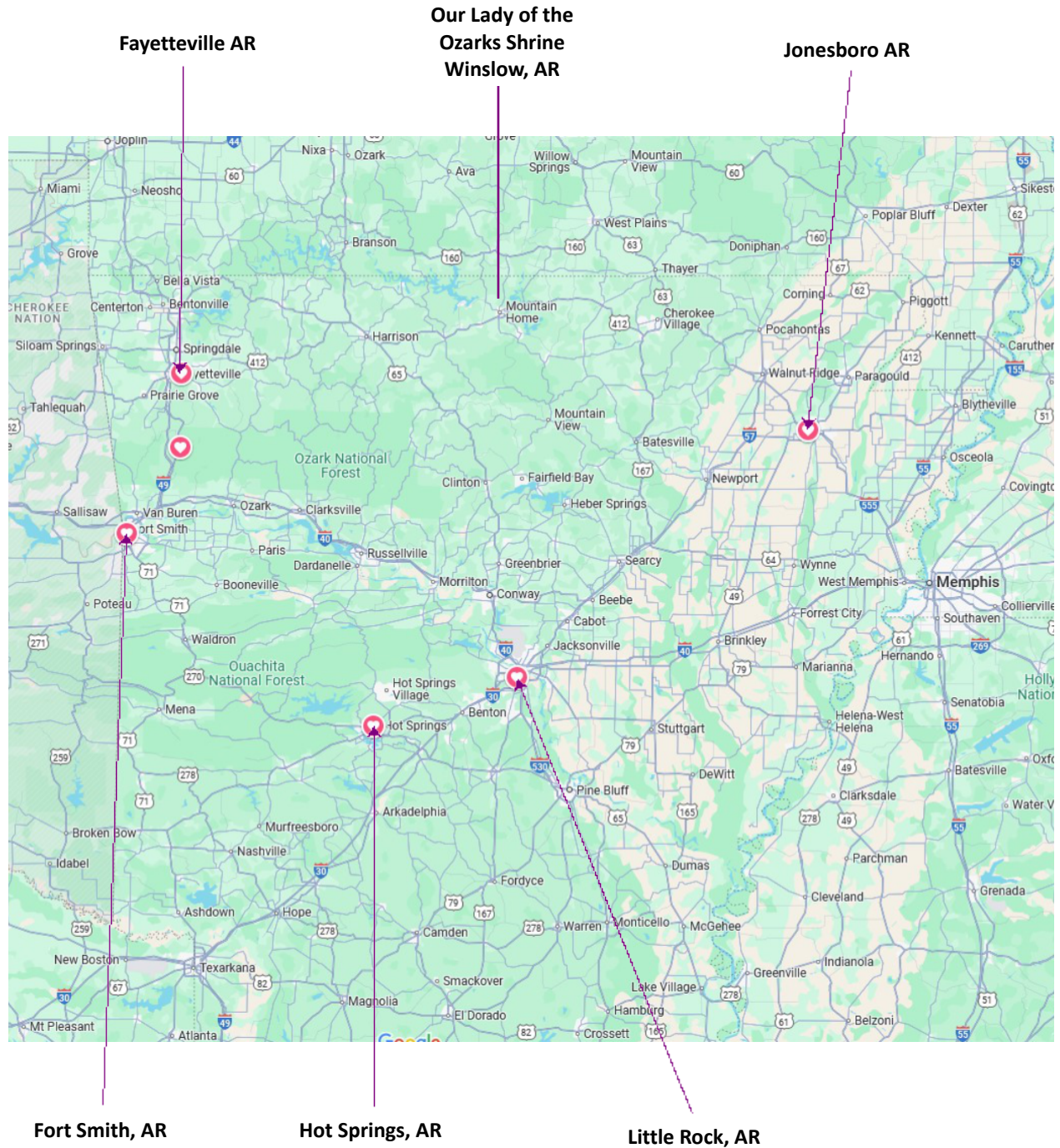


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"A gas station transformed into an attractive little chapel and living quarters for the attending priest, makes up the mission for the Ozarks. This chapel is located near Winslow, on Mount Gaylor, the highest and most scenic point of the Fort Smith-Fayetteville highway."

I. Historical Background [1870 - 1944]

Records indicate that the remote northwest corner of Arkansas, including Fayetteville and Winslow, were served for number of years by sturdy priests, who took to horseback to spread and support the Catholic faith. Most came from Fort Smith, Van Buren, and later Fayetteville. Father Laurence Smyth was assigned to Fayetteville in 1870, but it was his brother, Father Michael Smyth, who actually built St. Joseph's Church there in the early 1970's. Some priests assigned there - including Father Michael - were dispatched to Winslow on an as-needed basis.

The three men most frequently mentioned as horseback riding priests who served the faithful in Winslow were Fathers Michael Smyth, P. P. Mazuret, and Patrick Enright. Those men had vastly different personalities, but shared a zeal for missionary work that enabled the faithful in and around Winslow to receive the attentions of Mother Church at least on an intermittent basis.

After the turn of the century, additional roads were built that improved travel and communications all over the state, though it was not until 71 Highway united Fort Smith and Fayetteville in 1931 that the mountainous areas around Winslow were more easily reached by car. A few segments of the original 71 Highway remain, and though it was a major advancement in concrete highway construction at the time, it seems almost impossibly narrow by today's (2018) standards. Indeed, the two-lane highway is not much wider than the width of any of today's automobiles, trucks, and buses. But the narrow, winding road - together with the established railroads - served the transportation needs of the region, and made it possible for tourist courts to be built for the convenience of vacationists (a nineteenth century term for "tourists") and summer residents who came to Winslow to relax. Bus service soon followed, and that also made Winslow and the surrounding area more accessible to travelers.



Clara Muxen at age
51, in 1936

Winslow was home for many religions denominations. But there was no Catholic church. And the lack of a church home for the Catholics of the area created a hardship for the few resident Catholics and visitors of the Catholic faith, who had to travel many miles either to Fayetteville or to Fort Smith to practice their faith.

But, on a late summer day in 1941, when the Muxen family - Clara, her brother Hugh, and their newly widowed mother Gertruda - was traveling from Iowa to Hot Springs, Arkansas, as Clara could "take the waters" in that health spa center to stem the recurrence of the tuberculosis that had afflicted her for years - and stopped at Sky-View Lodge for

refreshments, she would become a key-player in the establishment of a Shrine known officially as the Immaculate Heart of Mary, now popularly known as Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine.

Together with the generous, welcoming residents of the Winslow area, and the support of others all across the country - people who had never seen Arkansas or visited Winslow's beautiful mountains - Clara Muxen would lead a coalition of dedicated Catholics and non-Catholics in the erection of the simple stone chapel that to this day graces at the top of the Boston Mountains of Winslow.

Clara had professed vows to the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Toronto in Canada in 1910, and when her disease worsened, in 1926, she asked dispensation of her vows, and spent the years 1926 - 1930, seeking a cure. By 1931, when she was 46 years old, her illness had loosened its grip sufficiently to allow her to return to Sioux City, Iowa, bringing the foot-tall statue of the Virgin of the Smile she had purchased in Switzerland.

Clara's connection to the Blessed Virgin Mary was considerably strengthened by her improved health.

The Muxens settled into their new home in Winslow, and though they had fallen in love with the scenic vistas and "interior quiet" of the place, they knew something was missing: there was no Catholic church within twenty-five miles. The drive to Fayetteville for daily Mass showed them, in Clara's words, "new beauties of the countryside as the rising sun spread its purplish hue all long the way".

But scenic as it was, that daily drive to Fayetteville or to Fort Smith to attend Mass was a hardship in the days or poor roads and simple cars. Practicing Catholics among Winslow's citizens and vacationists with summer homes in the small resort community were left with the difficulties of a long trek either north or south if they wished to practice their faith.

It would happen next that in her first meeting with Bishop Albert L. Fletcher, Clara Muxen discussed with him the possibility of a mountaintop mission with the hope that it would evolve into a Shrine. Clara told him that all that she wanted at that point was permission; "the funds would be left to Our Blessed Mother to guarantee". Bishop Fletcher said that "the Most Rev. John B. Morris, D. D., the Bishop of the Diocese, would give permission for Mass on Mount Gayler if there were twenty-five Catholic residents in their locality".



Bishop Albert L. Fletcher
Auxiliary Bishop of Little Rock, AR
(Later Bishop of Little Rock, AR)

So Clara returned to Winslow and quickly spread the good news to other interested Catholics in the mountain, and - with the help of her friend Ann Guillot - immediately began conducting a survey of the forty-seven square mile area from West Fort in the north to Mountainburg in the south. Her other friend, Elizabeth Sublet, personally visited every tourist court, home, cabin, or other dwelling far into the hills, meticulously cataloging the name and religion of each person she encountered. Amazingly, she managed to find twenty-five Catholics!



Bishop Albert L. Fletcher
Bishop of Little Rock, AR

Bishop Morris was even more enthusiastic than was Bishop Fletcher himself, and now all that was needed was a fitting place to hold Mass, in order to bring the Blessed Sacrament to the Boston Mountains.

The House the Muxens had purchased was situated on land that also held the Southland Gasoline Company's filling station complete with an open-front repair shop. The filling station had been closed, and Clara saw in it the possibility of a temporary site for a chapel. With the help of the Catholics and non-Catholics of Winslow, the ladies took on the task of turning an oil-stained former gas station into a chapel worthy of becoming the temporary home of the Blessed Sacrament.

But the little gas station was intended to be just the beginning.

She wrote: "During a sleepless night, a little church took form in my imagination, a chapel of native rock. The day after, I set to work to make my dream come true".

T. B. Harris, the owner of four hundred feet of level highway frontage next to the Muxen property, was interested in Clara's vision for the proposed church, and quickly agreed to sell her the land. Now, the three determined ladies had their base in place, including an option to purchase land for the permanent church.

In the office of the Catholic Church Extension Society in Chicago, Father Joseph B. Lux contributed with a liturgical tabernacle and a finely-crafted white crucifix, which later would grace the transformed chapel. Still in Chicago, Father Jude McKinnon, chaplain of the Edward Hines Junior Hospital, spent considerable time on the Arkansas missions, gave the first dollar toward a building fund for the new chapel.

Then Clara went to Iowa, where her friends in Sioux City, in her hometown of Carroll, and the small village of Roselle, generously contributed with money and altar goods. Next she sought her old friends in Detroit, who created Our Lady of the Ozarks Guild and held a bridge party that nettled \$112 to be used to purchase the first lads of

native rock for the chapel. Detroit friends also contributed with a beautiful chalice and ciborium for use in the little gas station chapel and them later in the native stone church.

The contributions of immediate neighbors were important and varied. Mr. John Burns of Burns Gables donated three prize walnut planks 12 inches wide he intended to use in his tourist court and restaurant, that became a communion rail under the steady hand of Alvin “Blocky” Riddle, a local carpenter who worked diligently at that task and many others.

Soon, all the tiny chapel would need was a priest!

World War II

At this point, everything was on track, but not for long. On December 7, 1941, the Empire of Japan launched an attack on American ships in Pearl Harbor, Oahu, and the United States was plunged into World War II.

With the outbreak of war, hardships increased among Winslow’s largely unskilled, small farming population who lived scattered throughout those hills. Their already difficult lives quickly became measurably harder. Everything was suddenly in short supply. Rationing imposed restrictions of all kinds on goods that may or may not have been available, anyway. Families struggled to put food on the table, to buy the gasoline, oil and tires that would enable them to get their jobs if they were fortunate enough to have found paying work.

In some ways, it was a terrible time to try to build a church. In other ways, it was the perfect time.

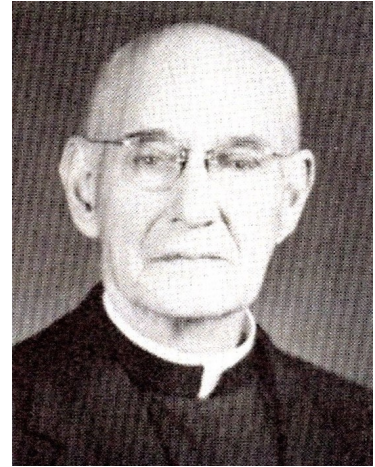
As the war progressed, and battles were fought, people were wounded and killed. It was a constant, daily, frightening specter in the lives of everyone. Prayer meetings were held frequently by members of every faith. In Winslow, the quest for a Catholic church went on. The war slowed the effort but did not stop it. Donations were sought for the building of the permanent church, and people gave what they could, in labor, materials, and small amounts of money.

Meanwhile, work continued on transforming the humble gas station into a simple chapel. The altar frame of liturgical style was made from the old tire rack that had been bolted to the wall.

In June, 1942, distinguished guests arrived to assess the transformation’s progress: Bishop Albert Fletcher and his friend, Father John C. Phillips, a Redemptorist. They were greeted with an impressive sight when they reached the top of the mountain: the little former gas station was indeed a mission chapel, they agreed.

A Priest comes to the Our Lady of Ozarks Mission

In the midst of the expanding war effort in every part of the nation, Bishops Fletcher and Morris kept in mind the spark of faith tightly held by that tiny congregation on a mountaintop in the remote Boston Mountains. Keeping working their contacts, finally they assigned Father Lawrence F. Schaefer of Tontitown's St. Joseph's Church to become pastor at Our Lady of Ozarks Mission, the tiny gas station chapel, in October, 1942.



Father Lawrence F. Schaefer
1st Pastor

Father Schaefer offered his first Mass on the Feast of Christ the King, on October 25, 1942, with a congregation of 50 present inside, and spilling outside the chapel, which could accommodate only 12 worshipers. That service marked the beginning of the little mission's journey to becoming the only Shrine in Arkansas.

Father Schaefer and visiting priests offered Mass at the mission four times before the end of 1942. Masses continued at least one a month throughout all the 1943, and into February of 1944. Round trip distance from Tontitown to Winslow was nearly 80 miles.

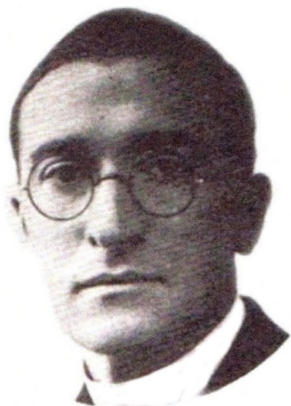
The construction of the Stone Chapel begins

During Father Schaefer's tenure, Clara Muxen secured ownership of the 2.34 acres of flat land along the highway, and donated it for the construction of the stone chapel. Thirty loads of rocks were delivered to the site, and the fund for the statue of Our Lady of Ozarks, Virgin of the Smile, grew to the impressive sum of \$200. At a time when gasoline was sold for 15 cents per gallon, 10 pounds of potatoes cost 35 cents, and 5 pounds of sugar 31 cents, the \$200 in the statue fund represented a considerable amount of money.

II. The Stigmatine Era [1944 - 1961]

a. Father Mackin, CPS becomes the first resident priest [February 2, 1944]

Bishops Fletcher and Morris made known the need for a resident priest in the mountains of Winslow. So Father Charles Zanotti, CPS, Superior of the Stigmatine Province of the Holy Spouses in the U.S.A., and Father Joseph A. Costa, CPS, joined Bishop Fletcher in a trek from Little Rock to Winslow. Snow had fallen during the night before, and the temperature dropped significantly. But thankfully the curving mountain road was not slick, because the snow had melted from it.



Father Charles Zanotti, CPS
Superior Provincial
American Stigmatine Province

Less than a month later, in February 2, 1944, Father Francis W. Mackin, CPS, who had come from White Plains, NY to that scenic and remote area to build a church, took up residence in the converted gas station Chapel. That day was the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin, and then he set to work building the church he had come to build.

He had been ordained in September, 1939. The hardships he faced took many forms, from primitive living conditions to the loneliness of being a stranger to the area, in addition to the circumstances of the war and the poverty of his flock.

Immediately, he contacted his friends and former colleagues in Natick, Massachusetts, and in Italy, at the *Angelicum* Institute in Rome and at the International Seminary in Verona, where he had studied philosophy and theology, and learned a fluent Italian along the way. He wrote them a letter explaining exactly why their assistance was so critical. He pointed out the remoteness of his parish, his life in a room in a former gas station, with no conveniences like running water, heat, telephone, etc. And he finishes his letter with an appeal that is touching in its simplicity, to assist him at making possible the erection of a new little combination rectory and chapel.

Father Mackin's fundraising efforts yielded a considerable amount from friends and acquaintances. Monsignor Edward F. Ryan (later Bishop of Burlington) donated \$4,000 to the Shrine, in memory of his brother, a gift that enabled the start of construction on the \$30,000 stone chapel. The chapel measures 63 x 47 feet, and, in stark contrast to the little gas station mission, it could accommodate 100 worshipers. North of the chapel, a rectory was added; it was built from materials salvaged from two other homes, at a cost of \$10,000. Shortly after, Little Flower Lodge was constructed as well.



Father Francis Mackin, CPS
1st Stigmatine Pastor

According to the Arkansas Democrat Gazette Magazine: "The church was built of native sandstone and included twenty-three memorial windows, which were financed by the contributions of friends throughout the nation. These gifts were freely given by people of all sorts. Father Mackin told about the contribution of three sailors who had heard of the building of the Shrine from some source. Just before their warships pulled up anchor in San Francisco Bay, these bluejackets sent a good part of their pay, along their best wishes for the success of the mission".

b. The construction of the Shrine Begins [May 29, 1944]

The construction of the Shrine began on May 29, 1944, with Father Mackin turning over the first shovelful of earth. Chester Nelson of Fort Smith was the architect, and Mullen and Baker of Alma, along with Harold Duncan of Winslow, were the builders.

c. The Shrine is Informally Dedicated [August 27, 1944]

The Shrine was nearly completed by August. Photos taken in the program for the informal dedication Mass on August 27, 1944 show that the native stone outer covering was halfway finished. On the date, a Solemn High Mass was presided by Father Mackin, with the assistance of Rev. Mark Berger, OSB, pastor of St. Boniface's Church in Fort Smith, and Rev. Lawrence Schaefer. Other celebrants included the Rev. Paul Desmond, pastor at Immaculate Conception Church in Fort Smith; the Right Rev. Paul Mahlen, OSB; the Rev. Albert Marchiano, chaplain at St. Scholastica's; the Rev. Charles McCauley, pastor at St. Joseph's Church in Fayetteville; and the Rev. Joseph A. Costa, CPS (who was representing the Very Rev. Charles Zanotti, CPS, Superior Provincial of the Stigmatines in the U.S.A.).

During that day-long ceremony, Father Costa conducted the "Blessing of the Papal and American Flags"

Father Costa, a captain in the Army, would become important to the future of the little Shrine. At that time, he was chaplain in a camp in Monticello, Arkansas, and ministered to the German prisoners of war there. He was a native of Feldkirch, Austria, and spoke German fluently, an asset that made his service at the camp of considerable value.

Father Costa would later become the Shrine's second resident priest, and serve there until mid-1959.

After Mass, Father Mackin also dedicated the statues inside and outside the Shrine. The statue of Our Lady of the Ozarks, Virgin of the Smile, on the front lawn of the Shrine, was dedicated to the memory of Charles A. Kuper, a well-known Fort Smith businessman. A Rosary preceded the blessing of the statues and flags.

Those who had both worked so hard to make that day a reality, and those who had watched with interest as building progressed were likely aware that important project represented the will of God in action. In particular, Clara Muxen, Betty Sublet, Ann Guillot, and Bishop Fletcher.

The Shrine's official name is "Immaculate Heart of Mary", but its popular name is "Our Lady of the Ozarks, Virgin of the Smile".

There are many, similar definitions of a shrine. This one from Father Costa is

elegantly simple: “A shrine is a church or chapel set apart to honor God, in the name of one of His saints, a special place of piety and devotion, a hallowed center of spiritual life, where one’s soul will be renewed, comforted, and strengthened”. Our Lady of Ozarks is a diocesan Shrine, which means it was designated that by the local bishop. Other types of shrines are National Shrines, which are approved by the national conference of bishops; and international shrines, which are named by the Holy See in Rome.

In 1945, Father Mackin continued requesting more aid.

The year 1945 was historic in world affairs because it was the year in which the World War II officially ended. VE Day was May 8, 1945 (Victory in Europe); the first atomic bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, and VJ Day was August 14-15, and later September 2 for the formal signing of surrender (Victory in Japan). Even though peace was declared, Allied troops were still engaged in mopping up operations in both the European and the Asian theaters of war. Soldiers were still at risk, still in danger.

d. Ground-breaking for a Craft School [mid-1940’s]

In the mid-1940’s, Clara Muxen and her friends, with the intention of providing to the less fortunate residents of the Winslow area means of making a living for themselves and their families, broke ground for the building of a craft school, adjacent to the Shrine.

e. The “Gas Station” Chapel is converted into a Thrift Store [mid-1940’s]

The little gas station which had served as a chapel from late 1941 until the summer of 1944 - critical years in the Shrine’s development - was put to good use. In its third “career”, the gas station chapel was converted into a thrift store which sold good, used clothes to locals at very low prices. Clara’s friends from around the country, including former student and later teaching colleague Helen Keliher, sent clothes to the little shop from as far away as Detroit, Chicago and Dallas.

f. A Tower Bell is erected [1946]

In 1946, a stone bell tower was erected at the North side of the Shrine.



North side of the Shrine, showing the stone bell tower added in 1946.

g. The Shrine is Formally Dedicated [August 25, 1946]

As the year 1946 arrived, preparation for the formal dedication of the Shrine in August began. Several committees with well defined responsibilities for planning were formed, and they came together for a final meeting with Father Mackin on August 11. Men and women from the Winslow parish as well as many other from Fort Smith and Fayetteville stepped up to assist the dedicatory occasion one to be remembered.

Dedicatory events began at 8:00 a.m. on Saturday, with a High Mass sung at the altar of the Blessed Mother “at the foot of her most unique statue, for the benefactors of Our Lady’s Shrine”.

On Sunday, “the peal of the bell erected in the new tower in 1946 will usher in a full day of memorable activity for this little Shrine”.

The *Guardian* published: “The Most Reverend Bishop John B. Morris, D. D., ardent devotee of the Blessed Mother, will render public homage to her on Sunday, August 25,

when he will travel 200 miles to dedicate the Shrine of Our Lady of the Ozarks at Winslow, Arkansas”.

Following the Mass, a special testimonial dinner was provided to the Bishop and his visiting clergy and guests. And, at 3:00 p.m., Bishop Morris, preceded by the clergy and assisted by his auxiliary, Bishop Fletcher, and Bishop Ryan, proceeded to lay the cornerstone and dedicate the Shrine. The dedicatory sermon was preached by Bishop Morris; the Solemn Pontifical Benediction was sung by Bishop Fletcher, terminating the day in gratitude to Almighty God for the innumerable blessings that have been wrought at the Shrine.

So, the little mission became officially Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine at its formal dedication on August 25, 1946.

And by the time of that final dedicatory Mass in August of 1946, parishioners were able to sit on sturdy, finely-crafted but simple oak pews donated personally by Bishop Morris, as a sign of his fondness for the support of the little Shrine.



Dedication Cornerstone

And on the third day of the Dedication Spiritual Program, a Solemn High Mass of Requiem was pleaded for the souls of the faithful departed who have been memorialized at the Shrine of Our Lady.

g. Father Costa replaces Father Mackin [December 22, 1946]

Sadly, Bishop Morris died in October that same year, only two months after he presided the dedicatory Mass at the Shrine.

Support for the Shrine among Father Mackin’s friends and colleagues continued.

Compared to his time spent living in the former repair shop of the little gas station chapel, the new rectory with its electricity, heat, and running water seemed like a palace.

However, Father Mackin, who had worked so hard to build the stone Shrine, the rectory and the Little Flower Lodge, did not enjoy for long the fruits of his labors. The young priest left Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine soon after its building program was complete, in order to undertake another similar assignment, at the request of Father Paul V. Daly, CPS, Superior Provincial of the Stigmatines. Father Mackin - a missionary by preference - doubtless viewed his missionary work at Winslow as stable enough to be safely handed over to another dedicated Stigmatine and fellow priest Father Joseph A. Costa.



Father Joseph Costa, CPS
2nd Stigmatine Pastor

Father Costa took up his post at Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine on December 22, 1946, and continued the Shrine's mission work, as well as set about securing funds to pay off the debit which had accrued during the Shrine's construction.

The Shrine became a favorite stop for travelers of all kinds, as they journeyed through Arkansas. Visitors left monetary gifts to sustain the work of the Shrine, and to maintain its lovely grounds. Some even became continuing contributors by mail. Father Costa and other priests who followed him carried on Father Mackin's tradition of reaching out to benefactors all over the country.

Father Costa's tenure gave rise to many changes to the Shrine, and to the lives of the people who worshiped there. He was an older priest, having been ordained in Rome in 1919, and brought with him wide experience with humanity, including the insights gained from being a chaplain at two camps for prisoners of war during World War II, which had recently ended when he arrived at Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine.

Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine became known as a site that welcomed pilgrims seeking the opportunity to hold retreats, and so many groups looked for that sanctuary in the mountains.

When Bishop Fletcher made the suggestion of having a diocesan pilgrimage at the Shrine in the second "Around the Diocese" column published on July 15, 1949, Father Costa quickly organized one to be held a month later, on August 21, 1949. It was the first of many annual pilgrimages. Attendances at that and at later pilgrimages were impressive. Pilgrims from around the state and regions came, and they numbered in the hundreds. The little Shrine was filled to overflowing. Many pilgrims stood outside during

the Mass being offered inside before the pilgrimage on the grounds began. State Police officers came to assist with traffic control on the highway, and parking of the cars and buses that brought pilgrims for the occasion.

Pilgrimages continued for many years, with the leadership of Bishop Fletcher.

Korean Peninsula War [1950 - 1953]

War came again on June 25, 1950, this time on the Korean Peninsula. For three years, until an armistice brought hostilities to a close on July 27, 1953, Americans were once more embroiled in war. Prayers for our soldiers intensified as the conflict took the lives of 36,914 Americans and nearly 3 million North and South Koreans.

Father Costa receives a silhouette of “Our Lady of the Ozarks” [1951]

During the summer of 1951, Father Costa, on behalf of Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine, was honored to receive from the famous artist and Dominican Nun Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, OP, a silhouette of “Our Lady of the Ozarks”, cut from one piece of black paper, approximately 2 ½ x 2 feet, and framed in oak. Along with the silhouette, Sister Mary Jean wrote a poem dedicated to and titled “Our Lady of the Ozarks”.

Clara Muxen’s mother and brother die [1958]

In 1958, Clara’s mother, Gertruda, and her brother, Hugh, died, leaving Clara on her own.

h. Father Fayad replaces Father Costa [December, 1959]



Father Samuel Fayad, CPS
3rd Stigmatine Pastor

The last Stigmatine Pastor to serve the Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine was Father Samuel Fayad, CPS, whose tenure began on December, 1959. His assistant, Father James Cunningham, CPS, began earlier that year, on August 28.

According to Stigmatine records, another Stigmatine, Father Seraphim Piazza, also served in Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine.

In a letter to supporters outside the region, Father Fayad made clear the needs of the parish, pointing out the difficulties of the people to come for Mass: some have to travel 45 miles, some have to give up of the journey as they can’t pass the a section of the road that is underwater and return home disappointed. The rectory is in poor condition; the cold winds come through the old and dilapidated windows and the curtains and shades. No furnace in the rectory nor in the church.

During their short tenure in Winslow, Father Fayad and Cunningham presided over annual pilgrimages blessed by and attended by Bishop Fletcher, and they saw to the needs of both vacationists and parishioners as attendance varied during the tourist seasons.

Tourism increasing [early 1960's]

Tourism increased in the early 1960's, and many more visitors stopped at the Shrine on their journeys through the mountains.

Father Fayad put considerable efforts into upgrading the grounds of the Shrine by adding new shrubbery and blooming flower beds. Inside the Shrine, paneling was installed behind the main altar, and wooden canopies were constructed above the statues of the Virgin of the Smile and of St. Joseph. Father Fayad also revived the old customs of blessing automobiles, and he and Father Cunningham made themselves available for such blessings for travelers on Sundays from 2 to 4 p.m.



**Father James Cunningham, CPS
Associate Pastor**

The Inauguration of the Craft School Building [1960's]

Clara and her friends' efforts to build a Craft School continued even during both wars, and in the years 1960's the building was finally inaugurated.



Clara Muxen stands in front of the Craft School she built

Continuous Pilgrimages [1960's]

The pilgrimage suggested by Bishop Fletcher to Father Costa in 1949 grew into an annual event, and continued through the Fayad years.

In his publication of the August, 1960 pilgrimage, Bishop Fletcher pointed out the importance of continuing to pray for the peace of the world. He also mentioned that "it is difficult to make people realize the danger and consequences of atomic war".

During the summers, the Shrine was packed with visitors and travelers who viewed the Shrine as a "haven of rest, where travelers can adore God and pay homage to His Blessed Mother, honored at the Shrine".

During the winter months, the situation changed. At that time - sixteen years after the Shrine was built - only 21 full-time parishioners lived within a 50-mile radius and attended Mass year-round.

Living in mountains meant dealing with wintertime transportation challenges: "The mountain roads are often impassable when covered with snow and ice, and rains cause many creeks in the area to rise".

Once at the Shrine, winter's presence was still evident: "There is no furnace in the church, and the small gas heater is inadequate. Last winter, Mass once was briefly interrupted when water in the altar cruet froze and had to be thawed out with a candle before the Holy Sacrifice could continue. The Sunday collection on winter Sundays amounts to an average of about \$11".

By the time of the pilgrimage in 1961, the number of permanent resident Catholics attending the Shrine year round had grown to 25.

i. Stigmatines leave Winslow [September 1, 1961]

Fathers Samuel Fayad and James Cunningham left Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine on the first of September, 1961.

Father Fayad explained that the Stigmatines had to relinquish work in smaller missions such as Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine, in order to be able to establish a mission in Thailand and expand seminary facilities at Waterville, NY.

Their departure ended the role of the Stigmatines in Winslow, which had begun with the arrival of Father Francis W. Mackin on February 2, 1944.

III. The Glenmary Era [1963 - 1975]

With the departure of Fathers Fayad and Cunningham, responsibility for administering the Shrine was temporarily transferred to the Rev. John C. O'Dwyer, chaplain of the St. Thomas Aquinas University Parish, at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville.

Responsibility for the Shrine was transferred on June 25, 1963 to the Glenmary Order, with the arrival of Father Venantius Paul "Mike" Preske.

Clara Muxen leaves Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine [1964]

In 1964, through a series of circumstances probably linked to her failing health, Clara Muxen left Winslow and her connections to Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine and to St. Scholastica in Fort Smith, and went to live in Jonesboro for her final two years.

The Shrine acquires a Cemetery [1965]

In 1965, Father Preske shepherded the process of acquiring land three miles north of the Shrine for the establishment of a tiny Catholic cemetery to serve the area. Documents date the acquisition of the cemetery land on January, 1965. Several parishioners have been buried in the small cemetery, with the first being Clara Muxen, in 1966.

In 1975, the Glenmarys felt it was time to give Father Preske a new assignment. So, he left Winslow on May 25, 1975.

IV. The Diocesan Era [1975 - 2025]

Father McCarthy succeeds Father Preske [1975]

Rev. Kevin J. McCarthy succeeded Father Preske as pastor beginning on July 18, 1975. He was a dedicated priest and a world traveler. He often led tours to the Holy Land and Europe, offering his expertise as a guide to any who cared to come along on the journeys.

Father McCarthy's health was failing in his later years, but he persevered in his mission to serve the parishioners at the little Shrine as long as he could carry on. Finally, he could no longer live alone in the Shrine's rectory, so he moved to a retired priest's home in Waldron. When he felt enough to make the journey, he would summon his strength and drive the 87 miles to Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine to offer Mass. He knew the little Shrine had no other priest to stand in for him, and no successor to take over for him.

He became serious ill, and his visits to the Shrine to offer Mass became less and less frequent. He died on December 22, 1992, while dressing to come to Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine to offer Mass.

The Shrine is closed and faces an uncertain future [January, 1993]

Unfortunately, Father McCarthy had problems on dealing with people, and also with finances in the Shrine. After his death, the Most Rev. Andrew J. McDonald, Bishop of Little Rock, and his driver, had to face the icy roads to reach the Shrine, where the bishop found irregularities. In response to the concern of parishioners, the bishop issued instructions to the congregation on what to do about the Shrine until he could come to discuss its future with its community.

Then, on January 26, 1993, Bishop McDonald notified the community that he and Monsignor William J. Galvin of Fort Smith would come for Mass on May 9, and meet with the congregation afterwards to explain the results of their evaluation of the entire situation. Until then, Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine would remain closed.

On May 9, Bishop McDonald and Monsignor Galvin came as promised and offered Mass at the Shrine. A luncheon was served after Mass, and Bishop McDonald used that time to visit with the members of the parish individually, as they gave voice to their concerns.

Bishop McDonald and Monsignor Galvin talked about the situation all the way back to Fort Smith, trying to figure out a way to solve the problem. There was a shortage of priests.

The doors of the Shrine were open once again! [June, 1993]

However, it came to happen that Monsignor Galvin gave the suggestion of bringing to the Shrine a deacon, instead of a priest. So, Bishop McDonald appointed Deacon Dan Daily, from St. Thomas Aquinas in Fayetteville, to the Shrine. He was the first permanent deacon ordained in Northwest Arkansas.

So, the doors of the Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine were open once again!

With the arrival of Deacon Dan Daily and his wife, Ginger, on June 1, 1993, the Shrine's community re-knit itself into a parish. Deacon Dan was able to arrange for a priest to offer Mass once a month most months. Priests came from Fayetteville, Springdale, Fort Smith, or occasionally other parishes and offered Mass on a Sunday.

Financially, the Shrine was in bad situation in 1992, and its bills were being paid by the diocese. Gradually, through creative leadership, the Shrine became solvent once again, and took over paying its own expenses.

Repairs and maintenance were carried out and paid for by parishioners and the Dailys.

In the mid-1990's, the floor around the altar was reworked to eliminate complicated multiple levels, a leftover from the days before Vatican II, when the altar rested against the back wall.

New carpet, courtesy of Patty Snell, was installed in the altar area, and walnut wainscoting purchased by George Dryer was added around the walls.

In 2002, the parish hall - formerly Little Flower Lodge - was restored, thanks to the contributions of time, labor and money of many folks, including George Dwyer, Jean Crone, Daisy Bemrose, the Dailys, and others.

The newly renovated parish hall has two handicap accessible restrooms, a full kitchen, a large meeting room, two classrooms, and a sun porch. And - thanks to the Dailys - it also has a washer and a dryer; and - thanks to Patty Snell and George Dwyer - the dining room roof of the rectory was repaired.

Rita and Tom Johnson brought the Knights of Columbus from St. Joseph's Church in Fayetteville out to the Shrine, to put a new roof on the rectory and strip away the interior sheet rock, with an eye toward renovating the entire house in case a resident priest could be found. This project is on hold for the time being.

It is difficult to quantify the impact the Dailys had on the Shrine and its parishioners in the 22 years [1993 - 2015] of their service to the community of Winslow. Their contribution took many forms, as over the years they adopted the Shrine and its people, and worked to keep the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in place on that mountaintop Clara Muxen and Bishop Fletcher thought the perfect spot to erect a little stone chapel so many years before.

The Shrine from 2015 on: Revitalized and Thriving!

The Dailys were reassigned in 2015 to St. Joseph's in Tontitown, Arkansas, and Deacon Mike Henry, formerly of St. Joseph's in Fayetteville, became the parish administrator. The Shrine's pastor in 2015 was Father John Antony, and the associate pastor Father Stephen Elser, both of Immaculate Conception in Fort Smith. The two priests alternated offering Mass at the Shrine on Sundays.

The floor in the chapel was completely redone, a task that involved removing pews that had been installed in 1945, and then sanding down the nearly-black oak floor boards until their natural honey color was restored.

Next came the installation of central heat and air conditioning. That represented another major change, one that had been planned for many years. The old gas stoves at the front of the church were removed, and the stove pipe holes sealed.

The small Sacred Heart chapel at the rear of the Shrine was converted into a cry room, and the statue of Christ moved to the front of the church, on a pedestal behind the altar, where a life-size statue of St. Anthony stood for years (but unfortunately was shattered during a burglary in 1990's and never replaced).

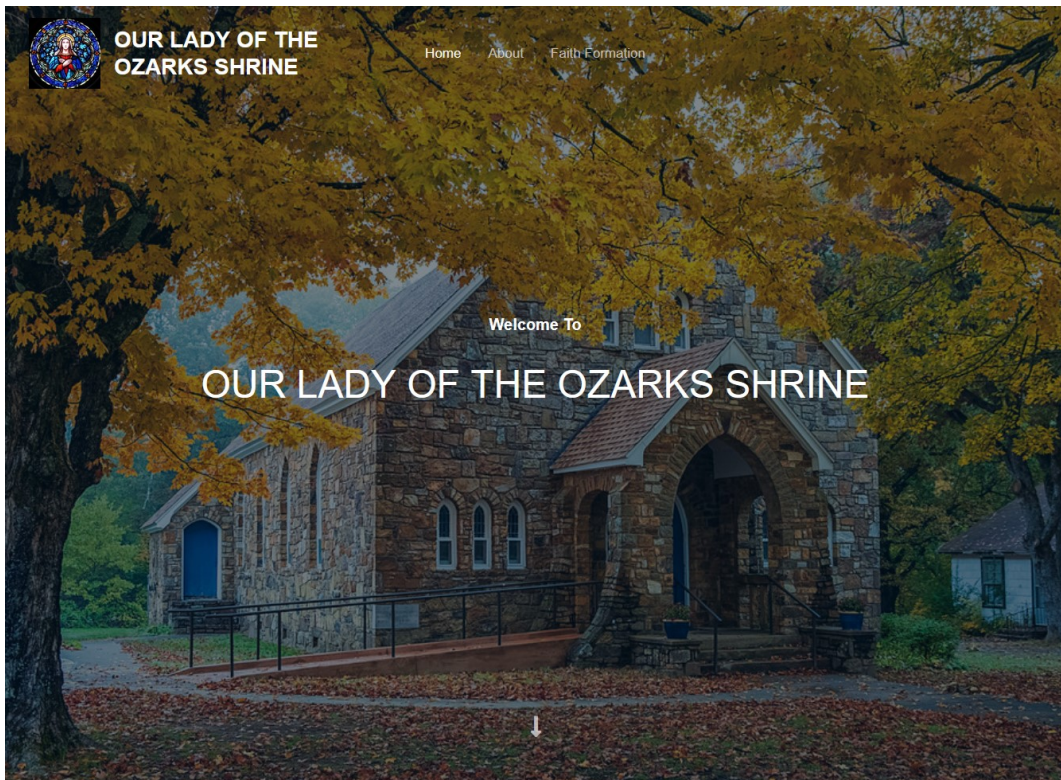
In the spring of 2018, a concrete handicap ramp was added to the south side of the chapel's front porch. It is stained the color of the stones around it, and blends in smoothly with the stone chapel.

Nowadays [2025], the priests serving the Shrine are Fathers Jason Tyler (Pastor) and Martin Dara (Associate Pastor), and Deacon Mike Henry is the Shrine Deacon and Administrator.



The Our Lady of the Ozarks Shrine nowadays [2025]

The Shrine holds a beautiful website at: <https://ourladyoftheozarksshrine.org/>



Deus det nobis plures annos venire!

May God grant us many more years to come!



ARKANSAS CATHOLIC

Little Rock, Arkansas

February 4, 1944

Page 1 of 8:

Priest To Start New Mission

Winslow - The Rev. Francis W. Mackin, C.P.S., member of the Stigmatine Fathers of Springfield, Mass., arrived at Our Lady of the Ozarks mission on Monday of this week to be its first resident pastor.

Father Mackin at the invitation of our Most Reverend Bishop, was appointed by the Very Rev. Charles Zanotti, Superior of the American Province of the Stigmatine Fathers. The mission is located on the high way near Winslow, Ark., about twenty miles south of Fayetteville. Mt. Gaylor, the highest point on the drive through the mountains between Fort Smith and Fayetteville, is only a few hundred feet away.



Young and enthusiastic, Father Mackin was ordained in Italy in 1939. A native of Natick, Mass., he took up his study of Philosophy at the Angelical Seminary, and Theology at the International Seminary, both at Verona in northern Italy. While a student, he learned to speak Italian fluently. He comes to the Diocese from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, White Plains, New York.

Father Francis Murphy, chaplain in the armed forces, who recently returned from the South West Pacific Theatre of war, is also a native of Natick, Mass.

The Stigmatine Fathers, comparatively a young order, were founded in Verona, Italy in 1875, by the Venerable Gaspar Bertoni. The Congregation has had priests in the United States for only 30 years, but its growth in the States now shows a Minor Seminary at Lynn, and a Major Seminary at Pittsfield, both in Massachusetts, and several parishes.

It is interesting to note that two...

Page 5 of 8:

Mission

(continued from page 1)

... Army Chaplains stationed at camps in Arkansas are members of the same Congregation. Chaplain Joseph A. Costa, C.P.S., is located at the Prison of War camp at Monticello, Ark., and Rev. Gerald Hogan, C.P.S., at the Advanced Air Base, Blytheville, Ark.

On Monday of this week, Father Mackin was accompanied by the Most Reverend Auxiliary and Father Costa on the trip to his new Ozark Mission.

It is the hope of the Most Reverend Bishop that Our Lady of the Ozark mission will develop into a shrine. Summer homes are expected to spring up amid beautiful scenery and lofty mountains. In normal times there are an unusual number of tourists in the locality.

In addition to this project, the mission will offer advantages yet undeveloped for local people. The necessity of time and trial in working out a plan is not being overlooked, but every advantage and encouragement are given the plan.

Father Mackin intends to conduct special devotions at the shrine for men in the armed services. This intention is one that is uppermost in mind of every Catholic and non-Catholic, who has relatives and friends in the service. After a program has been worked out, Father Mackin expects to acquaint Guardian, readers with the plan by which these intentions will be remembered.

The story of Our Lady of the Ozarks has been told in earlier issues of the Guardian. Readers will recall the work of Miss Clara Muxen in managing the preliminaries of establishing this shrine to Our Lady.

The new mission at Mount Gaylor is a converted Esso service station. Picture is shown at bottom of page one. It consists of an attractive little chapel and living quarters for the priest. The work has already caught the interest of many benefactors, who have made even the beginning of the mission possible.

Since October, 1943, the Rev. L. H. Schafer, pastor of St. Joseph's, Tontitown, has been in charge of Our Lady of the Ozarks.

“Our Lady of the Ozarks Mission”



A service station transformed late on attractive little chapel and living quarters for the attending priest, makes up the mission for the Ozarks. This chapel is located near Winslow, on Mount Gaylor, the highest and most scenic point of the Fort Smith-Fayetteville highway.

— Guardian Photo

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Above it was a reproduction of the following:

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(Continued from page 1)

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