

The Reflective Virgin

The “Reflective Virgin,” a sculpture in the tradition of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel is located in the meditation garden on the east side of the cathedral. Dennis Burghart, a Dodge City artist, carved the image for a block of Silverdale limestone.

“There is some subtle history at play here,” stated Burghart. “The statue sets atop a granite pedestal that was located in front of St. Mary of the plans College. A statue of Mary that now is located at Mt. St. Mary’s Convent in Wichita was first dedicated at the Academy site by Bishop John J. Hennessy, Wichita’s first bishop, on July 16, 1912. That is the feast of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. And Bishop Gilmore, our current bishop, was installed on her feast day in 1998.”

Burghart is a native of St. Joseph Parish, Offerle. At age 19, he left the seminary to be an artist. Today, he looks back on his religious training as the foundation for living out his vocation as a liturgical artist.

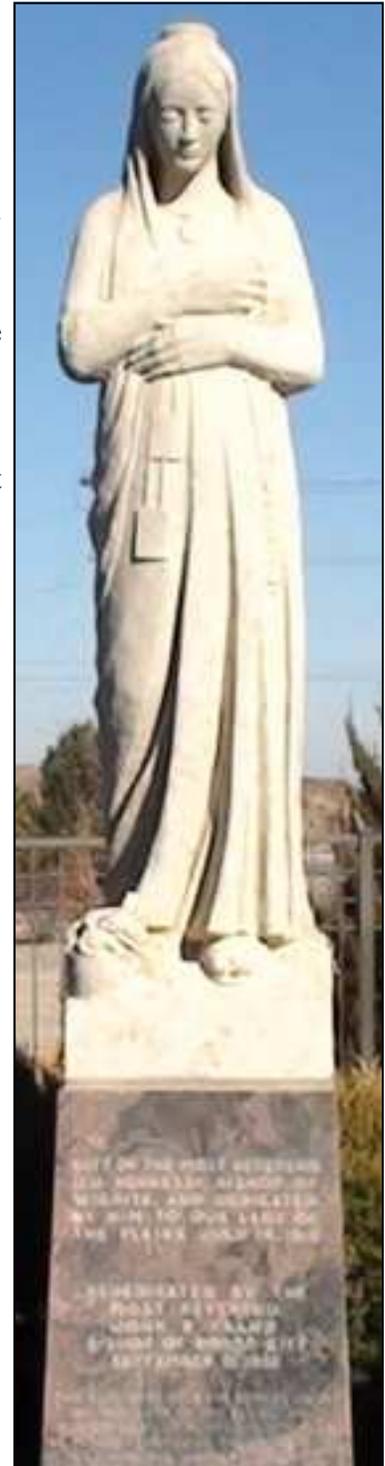
“I left the seminary because I didn’t know how I could be both a priest and an artist,” stated Burghart. “I thought I could do more good as an artist. That seems odd to me today, because I see priests as the closets thing to what an artist is. The priests that gave the best sermons were the best artists.”

Burghart discovered his gift for art while attending the parish elementary school in Offerle. His eighth grade teacher, Sister Sylvana Schulte, ASC, encouraged him to enter a minor seminary. Burghart enrolled at Mount St. Michael Abbey High School in Elkhorn, Neb. The seminary was operated by the Benedictines. “I had a priest art teacher,” said Burghart. “That and the liturgical emphasis of the Benedictines was helpful in cultivating my vocation in religious art.”

The theology in Burghart’s educational background reveals itself in his perception of the role of an artist. “The word education comes from the Latin ex (out) and ducere (to lead),” said Burghart.

“Education means to lead out... To lead out of darkness into light, out of ignorance into knowledge. The good fathers at Elkhorn did all they could to shine the light of truth into our darkened minds and souls. It is this shining light that I will forever call my education, my way out of the darkness.”

In Kansas, Burghart has been commissioned for pieces in churches in the dioceses of Dodge City and Salina. At Our Lady of Guadalupe Church in Dodge City, he carved the sanctuary cross and constructed



the ambo and credence table, and at St. Joseph, Ellinwood, he carved a pulpit depicting three Biblical scenes.

Burghart has also carved pieces for the chancery including a relief of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the sanctuary cross, and a sculpture of Father Juan De Padilla.

In the Diocese of Salina, Burghart sculpted a life-size limestone statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary for the church of the same name in Hill City. He also carved the sanctuary cross for St. Nicholas of Myra Church in Hays.

“I have carved sanctuary crosses for many churches,” said Burghart. “They are all different. I try to make them work with a given environment. I use my knowledge of art history and define the architecture of the church building in order to make contemporary or modern pieces that work with the architecture.

“the entire history of art is empty and useless unless it speaks of man’s relationship with his God. Vatican II was a tremendous blessing for the Church, but sufficient artistic response to the new needs has not been forthcoming. My Hope is for a new renaissance.”