



*Cathedral of
Our Lady of Guadalupe*

A Guidebook
Dodge City, Kansas

Virtual Tour of the Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe

“The Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Dodge City, the first new cathedral to be built in this country in the new millennium, is not really a church; it is a world, a universe unto itself. Its play of colors; its materials, its myriad forms and figures: all can teach us much, if we but learn to read them. May you enjoy your journey of this sacred space.”

Bishop Emeritus Ronald M. Gilmore

In the words of Bishop Gilmore

The Beginning

On a clear spring day, alone at the site, Robert Habiger, the architect, felt the power of the place, a richness of the soil that would give way to the beauty of a man-made place. He found the center point that day. He knew where the plaza should be placed, where the pilgrims could gather, which permitted him to find where the building should be placed. The land itself spoke the first design-word. It is as though the plain allowed a flower of thought, of prayer, to spring from its depths and its distances.”

“I placed the pit for the Easter Fire as the center of the plaza,” said Mr. Habiger. “This then became the geometric point of beginning for the layout of all the buildings on the site. Liturgically, the Easter fire is significant for it is in and through the Light of Christ, renewed each Triduum, that everything begins and evolves.”

The Journey

The Cathedral of Our Lady of Guadalupe gives us back the ancient gift of journey. Modern pilgrims, we approach the church by automobile, and are thus reminded of our country roots on these southwest Kansas plains. Ideally, our journey begins at home preparing ourselves and our children, with proper attire and a proper, prayerful, attitude, to celebrate the liturgy.

Out of our cars, we go on foot again, like our ancestors. By radiating walkways, our spiritual journey continues as we come together, moving through a small forest of trees that will, at its maturity, screen part of the structure even as it shelters us, and then magnify and concentrate the view. It alludes to the windbreak on the north, so common a feature on these plains, and establishes a more natural, organic setting which shades the approach to the church.

The design of the plaza includes a ceremonial drive for the ritual procession of a wedding or funeral. This drive, set off with special herringbone and cobblestone paving, allows for the elderly and handicapped to be dropped off at the main entrance. It is significant and not a coincidence that the main entrance is the main access point to the Cathedral for the disabled and the able-bodied alike. This aspect of equivalent experience is continued throughout the design even to the sanctuary.

Bell Tower

At 77 feet, the bell tower, not attached to the building as typically found, establishes a vertical connection between heaven and earth. It combines with the stainless steel crosses (one at 106 feet atop the Cathedral, and one at 50 feet atop the daily Mass Chapel) to create a pleasing visual balance.

Bells summon us. They ring out for the joys and the sorrows of our lives. The bell tower is thus an icon of our relationship with God and with one another.

From The Earth

Limestone, plaster, and copper were chosen as the principle materials for their humility and their durability. They come, each of them from the land.

The Silverdale limestone mined near Arkansas City, Kansas, was used throughout the structure as a

protecting skirt, as an embracing shield. The alternating rough and smooth rock (as the rough and the smooth alternate in our lives) was placed, as in ancient times, one stone upon another. It bears the handprint of the craftsman.

Plaster, stucco, is a material of the southwest, and it allows for a variety of color next to the stone and the glass: darker stucco in the principle interior rooms: medium in the offices and social areas are: lighter in the joining and the separating of building spaces.

The copper roof, once shimmering bright, weathered to a dark brown patina so as to become a backdrop to the building, not the focus of the building. The stainless crosses marking the places of worship now have an added brilliance in contrast to this rich earthy brown tone.

And that roof is arresting in other ways as well, within and from without. Its shape is suggestive of a large tent covering the faithful gather in prayer. It calls to mind the tent of Abraham, the tent of meeting erected by Moses, and the personalized tent of the new covenant, Jesus himself. With its pronounced skyward taper, it draws the eye upward, to the heavens, to infinity, into eternity itself. Having the unusual ability to mimic the clouds rising to thunderheads above the Kansas plains, the roof is *elemental force* as much as it is *sheltering security*, suggestive of the God who is Other quite as much as the God who is with us.

*The top section of the cathedral over the main worship space is symbolic of a lantern. At night, light from the interior illuminates the four gable windows that face the cardinal points of the compass. They allow the light from within – within the Eucharist, within the assembly, within the individual soul-to escape in all directions, to all parts of the diocese, to every corner of the world. Symbolically, this is the Light of Christ projected into the darkness. The center height of the gable window in the lantern is 20 feet and six inches. With the cross tapering to a point on top of the lantern, these elements create the **axis mundi**, the heavenly connection between the assembly and God.*

The Doors

You enter the Cathedral through a covered porch whose arched roof centers on those tall copper-clad doors that open up their entire fourteen-foot height: a ceremonial entrance to this church, and one that alludes to the doors of earlier cathedrals by their very size and construction.

The handles themselves take on extra meaning and provide endless stories for our children. They strike and strike again the harvest theme, so vital in all southwest Kansas. The tall exterior doors have copper handles made to represent vines of grapes ready for the harvest. Similarly, the tall interior doors have copper handles representing wheat ready for harvest: The push bars on the doors leaving church proper echo that theme but in whimsical fashion: the harvesting is done, the heavy heads have been threshed; have been used for the sacred meal we have just shared.

That harvest theme is echoed in the candle-sticks, with their wisps of growing wheat, waving in the Kansas wind; and in the candles at the doors of the reconciliation rooms, with their wheat and grapes; and in the paschal candle, with its wheat and grapes.

The Gathering Space

Upon entering, we arrive in a large enveloping space. This area helps us pass from our everyday life to the celebration of our liturgical life. It also helps us return to our daily lives to live the mystery we have celebrated. Simple materials were chosen and used throughout--the omnipresent limestone and the omnipresent earthy red tile so suggestive of the southwest--materials that speak a quiet word of permanence in our throwaway world. This area is also used in Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, in gathering parents, godparents, and infants for the celebration of Baptism, and in receiving reverently the mortal remains of those who have died.

Sacred Heart Chapel

Go to the right as you enter the gathering space, and you come to a memory in stone, one going back to 1951 and the creation of the diocese, and one going back to 1916 and the creation of a church: the daily Mass chapel, celebrated in a space that calls to mind the old Cathedral, the very origin of the new Cathedral.

The smaller worship space allows us to be more intimate with the action at the ambo, and at the altar, and with one another. It is visible reminder, as well; of the great gift we have in our Catholic Faith of being able to receive Jesus in the Eucharist daily.

Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Go to the left as you enter the gathering space, and you come to one of the treasures of the building, the shrine with its sacred image. That image has a special history.

Father Jose Betancourt, then pastor of Christ the King church in Silao, Mexico, gave the new Church of Our Lady of Guadalupe an exceptional gift at its dedication on 19 April 1950: this very image of *La Morenita*, executed by Tobias Villaneuvo of Leon, Mexico, and draped in cloth made by the Sisters of Christ the King in Siloa. Spirited out of Mexico, where it stood proudly in that old church, on the east-side of Dodge City, for fifty-one years.

It stands proudly here, in its same Philippine ribbon-stripped mahogany setting, for the life of this church. The holy image, with its hint *of flor y canto*, will call to all who pass this way.

The Worship Space

Go directly forward as you enter the gathering space, and you will come to the very heart of the cathedral complex. The journey following the radial axis line from that center point, the Easter Fire Pit, takes you through the main doors, through the baptismal font, through the processional cross, through the special chair that gives the building its name, cathedral, to, finally, the tabernacle.

This center point, and the line, and these works of creative hands, symbolize our own spiritual journey: answering the call to become members of the Family of God through baptism, joining in the liturgical celebrations, and having a place to worship Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. From this repository, we are charged with the duty of taking the Risen Lord to the sick and shut-in.

To organize all this space, the architect used a square within an octagon. The middle square was created by the intersection of the four major roof trusses. These trusses spring from the eight massive stone buttresses, and rise gently toward the center, arching over the space to establish a hovering roof.

The detailing and method of construction makes the roof appear as though it floats overhead. Light permeates the edges and top to cascade into the space. The southern pine roof decking is lighter in color, contrasting with darker support steel trusses and wood beams.

The square in the Catholic world of form and figure is a symbol for the earth, and the octagon is a symbol for the Risen Christ, its eight-sided form suggestive of the eighth day of the Resurrection.

Throughout the Cathedral, the square is repeated in the tile, in the windows, in the lights, and in the furniture.

Twelve major elements enclose the space and create a separation of the worship space from the Ambulatory. Each column has a dedication cross and candle. Other candles are located in the shrines, at the entrance to the reconciliation chapel, at the Eucharistic Reservation chapel, and in the worship space.

The Light of Christ is thus symbolically present throughout the entire Cathedral.

The church will seat 1,430. The pews are made of white oak with a natural stain. Blocks of seating, rather than a true radial plan, were used and more fully support the sense of the sacred being found in the action of the assembly. Not having the seating all point to one spot recognizes that the action of the

assembly occurs throughout the space. The placement of chairs within the different seating groups allows for flexibility for both diocesan and parish celebrations.

The Font

The first element we meet upon entering the nave of the church is the Font of Baptism. As entry into the Church, Baptism should be a sign of living water, refreshment for the weary spirit.

The most prominent water source in southwest Kansas is the artesian well, and precisely this bubbling up, free flowing water source is the image to be conveyed in the font. Rather than having water emerge from a rock, or cascade down a rock face, the water of this font bubbles up from below, causing ripples on the surface that radiate out from the center to the edges. The clear skylight above allows sunlight to reflect off the water's surface so as to animate the space both visually and physically.

The bronze font is in the shape of a cross, a symbol of the dying that brought new life. The water appears mysterious, dark and deep. The sunlight affords contrast between light and darkness. We enter the waters with the darkness of original sin, and we leave the waters bathed in the Light of Christ.

Baptism is a sacrament to be celebrated within the worshiping community. Our font allows all to see and to support those being baptized. It is expressly designed for full immersion of children and adults, a practice dating back to the very Baptism of Jesus.

The baptismal Font and the Altar respond to one another, as it were, through their materials and through their placement: a visual reminder of the close connection of all the Sacraments of Initiation, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist.

Elements of Interest

Our **Paschal Candle** carries the Flame/Risen Christ from the Easter Fire to the Baptismal Font. It is plunged into the water three times as we implore the Holy Spirit to transform the water into the very womb of new life for the Church. *We pray may all who are buried with Christ in the death of Baptism rise also with him to newness of life.* This prayer takes on added meaning when water is sprinkled on the casket as it arrives at the doors of the Church.

Located near the Font is the **Ambry** containing the vessels of olive oil blessed by the bishop at the Chrism Mass. *The Oil of Catechumens* used to anoint, bless, and strengthen those preparing for Baptism; the Oil of the Sick, used to bring strength and health to those suffering in body, mind, or spirit; and the *Sacred Chrism*, used to anoint those celebrating Baptism, Confirmation, or Holy Orders, and used as well to dedicate the altar in a new church. We anoint with Holy Oil because it is a sign of our special relationship with the Christ, the Anointed One.

Opposite the Ambry, **Special Books** are displayed. There is the *Book of the Gospels*, always ready for processional entry into our liturgical celebrations. *The Book of the Dead* is displayed in November when we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, and when we pray for those loved ones who have gone before us. *The Book of the Elect* is displayed from the First Sunday of Lent: a record of the names of the catechumens who have chosen to join our Church Family.

Near the Baptismal Font are the two **Reconciliation Chapels**, simple, spatial, reminders of the relationship between these two sacraments, baptism and penance. The Sacrament of Reconciliation reunites us with Christ and with the Body of Christ when we have failed by our sins to be faithful to our baptismal promises. The chapels are places of prayer which allow each person the choice of face-to-face or screened confession.

The Sanctuary

The platform where the processional cross, altar, ambo, and cathedra are located is large enough to accommodate all the sacramental actions, even those required by a Cathedral. Large blocks of limestone are used for the floor of the sanctuary, separating it visually from the rest of the church, and reminding all who see it of the previous European Cathedrals, the very places to which southwest Kansas immigrant families traced their ancestors. The dark granite ambo and altar sit majestically on this light cool stone floor.

To underscore its significance, the Cuban mahogany **Processional Cross** is placed physically in the exact center of the building. As the Easter Fire established the organizational relationships of the exterior of the complex, so the Processional Cross establishes the center of the interior. It stands in the midst of the assembly at each celebration, a stark reminder of the lasting importance of the cross.

The **Ambo** is somehow suggestive of a reading desk from which the revealed Word of God can go forth, deep calling unto deep. Made from the same granite stone as the altar with a highly polished surface to impart visual interest, it shows the intimate relation between the Christ of the word and the Christ of the Eucharist. The Second Vatican Council recovered ancient language when it spoke of the assembly being fed *from the Table of the Word and the Table of the Bread*.

If we really try listening to the Word of God, the experience will change us. We are encouraged to lay aside the printed Word and to listen to the proclaimed Word. When Christ speaks to us, it is appropriate to attend to the sound with all our eyes, with all our ears, and with all our hearts.

The **Altar** is the Holy Table on which we celebrate the Supper of the Lord. It functions at once as an Altar of Sacrifice at which the Sacrifice of Calvary is made present, and as a Banquet Table from which we are nourished with the Lord's Body and Blood. It stands proudly in our midst as the symbol of Christ, stone rejected by the builders, keystone of the structure.

Made of cut granite, with rough finish throughout, save for the refined finish of the mensa, our massive altar is square, suggestive of the earth, suggestive too of the equality of those who approach it to be fed with the heavenly food.

At the ground breaking, 20 May 2000, representatives from every church in the diocese brought containers of soil. Mixed together, that fine variegated Kansas earth rests beneath this altar, thus expressing the oneness of all Catholics in southwest Kansas. That ceremony ended on a final grace note. One final individual carried one final container to the excavation: soil carried from Mexico and lovingly kept for many years, soil from sacred Tepeyac itself.

Authenticated relics of the Twelve Apostles and the Four Evangelists lie in a handsome bronze container, a **Reliquary**, beneath the altar. Our faith rests on the foundation of these ancient pillars of the Church.

The altar and the ambo are placed to create a dynamic symmetry. The altar, being larger, is slightly closer to the central axis than ambo. They act in unity creating a balance for the entire sanctuary platform. In physical placement, this expresses the balance between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

The structure stretching up over the platform is meant to express the vertical connection between heaven and earth. The central vertical rise is segregated to give intrigue and uniqueness to the space. Natural light cascades from above and all around to add sparkle and mystery.

The **Cathedra**, seat of the bishop, is on axis to the main entrance. As the name for Cathedral comes from the bishop's chair, it is appropriate that the processional path is completed upon arrival at the *Cathedra*. It was designed to be a chair, not the throne: not an oversized and uncomfortable slab of wood or stone.

The dignity of the bishop's position is manifested through this appropriately proportioned piece, made

of rare Cuban mahogany and a contrasting Mexican wood, zircote. “If people knew more about the process, they would have a greater appreciation of the work”, the artist said. “This is not architectural millwork: the bishop’s chair is handcrafted from 20-inch mahogany planks. Ninety-five percent of the work was handwork.

“This is not something someone coming into the cathedral will see anywhere else. It is one of a kind. There is nothing like it in the country. Authorship and rarity add to the piece. Cuban mahogany has a deep beautiful subtle grain pattern.

“The chair has a deep dark rose color. It is both dignified and elegant. There are soft-eased edges and a sculptured hard line that will frame the bishop. It will convey a special presence, a symbol of his leadership, even when he is not there.”

The Tabernacle

The line that begun at the Fire Pit, and that extends through the center of the Church, ends at the large, seven-foot high, Tabernacle made of polished bronze with a patina, Cuban mahogany, and mirrors. The piece, with its strong hit of a Spanish, Moorish influence, stands on a cut granite pedestal that hearkens back to the Altar itself.

For it is from the Altar that the consecrated bread, the very Body of Christ, comes. It is reserved in the tabernacle as viaticum for the dying, as communion for the sick and those who are absent from the Eucharist, and as a mysterious substance to be adored...the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. The contour wall behind the tabernacle holds the Perpetual Adoration Chapel, a place for private adoration, prayer, and praise of Christ, the spiritual food who sustains us. Our private prayer must lead us to a greater recognition of Christ in ourselves and in others, spilling over into service of those in need.

The Ambulatory

The cloistered walkway around the perimeter of the Church, the Ambulatory, has six shrines: a visible reminder that we are encircled by the Eucharist. Our church family always includes more than those who are physically present: those who have gone before us in death, marked by the sign of faith, are also there, as are the saints of every time and every place.

The shrines place us in the company of heroic Christians of other times and other places. We take our present needs before them, and seek their intercession.

The intercession of the *Patrons of Religious Orders*. This shrine contains eleven saints representing the many religious communities who have served or who are serving in the Diocese. The medium is the familiar flat iconic figures of the New Mexico Santero tradition.

The intercession of the *Holy Family*. This shrine was initially designed to be interactive. Lack of respect for the sculpture and subsequent damage required that it be placed behind a protective barrier. Jesus, Mary and Joseph are carved from linden wood. The feast of the Holy Family falls on the Sunday after Christmas.

The intercession of St. Therese of Lisieux. Known as the Little Flower, Therese (1877-1897) is the newest Doctor of the Church. The bronze statue suggests the uplifting power of her writing, of her words. Patroness of the foreign missions, her feast is 1 October.

The intercession of St. Isidore and St. Maria de la Cabeza. This married couple, rendered here in terracotta, lived in Spain in the 12th century. He is, of course the patron saint of farming. His feast day is 15 May, and hers is the now famous 11 September.

The intercession of St. Maria Goretti. A paragon of chastity, Maria (1890-1902) was martyred while resisting an attacker. Done in marble here, striding toward her assailant offering forgiveness, she is the patron saint of youth. Her feast day is 6 July.

A Concluding Word

The point and the line, so important in the making of the building, do not end with the building, in fact. That line continues outside to the north and east. It ends with a large limestone statue in the meditation garden, *The Reflective Virgin*, done in the tradition of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. As she looks back along that line, toward the tabernacle, toward the church, toward her Son, she is a fitting end to our tour.

Keep all those things in your heart, as she did. Cherish them. Treasure them. Ponder them, as she did. The Cathedral of Our Lady Guadalupe can teach you much, if you but learn to read it.