

Mile-High Meditation:



As sun bathes a statue of Mary, a storm makes its way across the beautiful backdrop of the Rocky Mountains' rolling foothills at the Mother Cabrini Shrine in Golden, Colorado.

Mother Cabrini Shrine

Nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, this shrine commemorates the first US citizen to be declared a saint.

By Richard Bauman

If you're driving along Interstate 70 near Golden, Colorado, and you see a tall, glistening white statue of Jesus jutting from a hilltop, it's neither a mirage nor an illusion. It is the major landmark that marks the Shrine to St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, America's first US citizen saint, whose feast is November 13.

The shrine is on land Mother Cabrini purchased in 1910. It has chapels, grottoes, inspiring walking paths, an intriguing spring, and a retreat center—in addition to the nearly three-story-tall statue of Christ.

Francesca Cabrini was born two months prematurely in a small Italian village on July 15, 1850. Almost immediately after birth, she was rushed to the village church to be baptized for fear she wouldn't live very long. She survived and went on to fulfill her childhood dream of becoming a missionary nun.

In 1880, she founded the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Some years later, during an audience with Pope Leo XIII, she asked to be sent to China. The pope instead asked her to go to New York to minister to Italian immigrants living there.

She and six of her nuns arrived in New York in 1889. They ministered not only to Italian immigrants but also to the whole of the city. Learning English on the fly, Mother Cabrini founded an orphanage known as Cabrini Home, a hospital, and several schools.

In 1902, she headed west to Denver, Colorado. There she and her nuns ministered to Italian mine workers and their families. Queen of Heaven Girls Orphanage in Denver opened its doors in 1905 for orphaned daughters of miners.

When a property west of Denver became available in 1910, Mother Cabrini deemed it just right for a summer camp for the girls from the orphanage and scooped it up. The property already had a small farm, and several nuns moved there to maintain it. That year Mother Cabrini also became a US citizen.

"I will go anywhere and do anything in order to communicate the love of Jesus to those who do not know him or have forgotten him."

—St. Frances Cabrini

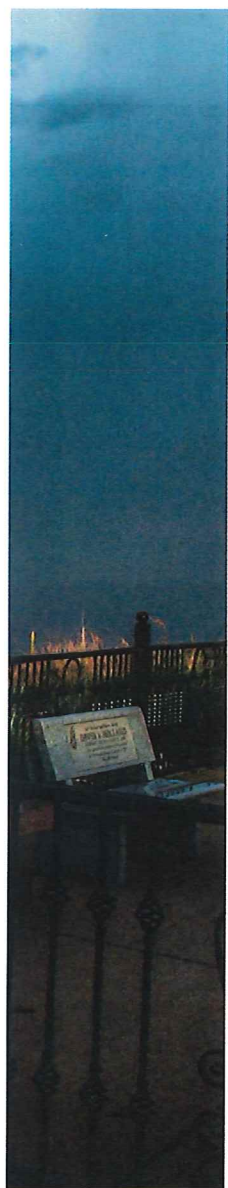
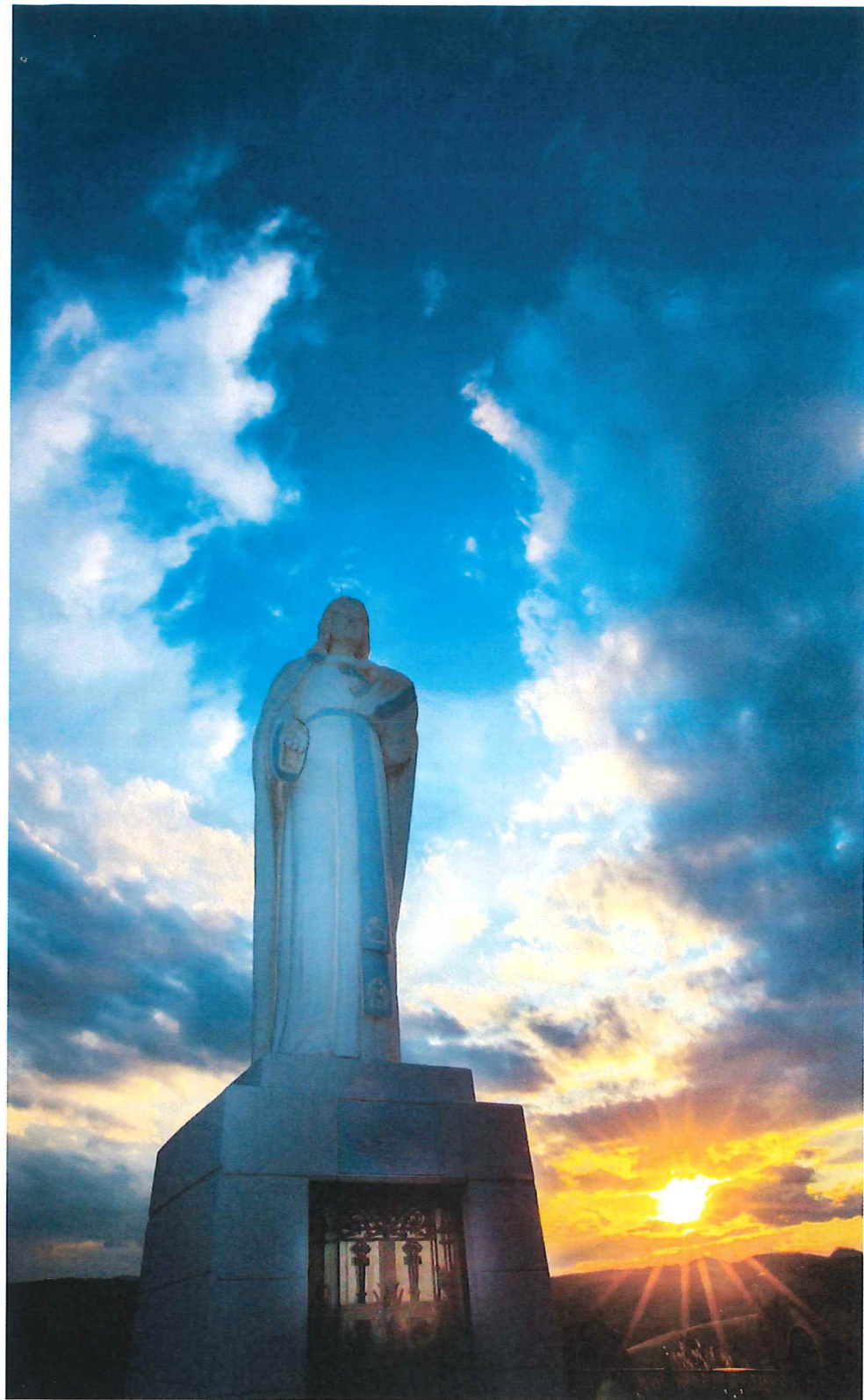


PHOTO COURTESY MOTHER CABRINI SHRINE/PATRICK DILLON PHOTO



"Nothing is impossible to the Sacred Heart of Jesus," Mother Cabrini once said. The shrine's focal point for many visitors is this statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Visible from the highway, the statue is 22 feet tall and stands upon an 11-foot-tall base.

THE SPRING: SOURCE OF FRESH WATER

There was one problem with the property she purchased, however: Its only source of water was a small pond. Water suitable for drinking, cooking, and bathing had to be hauled from some distance by wagon. During one of her visits in 1912, the sisters were grouching to Mother Cabrini about the lack of readily available water. She pointed her cane at some rocks and said: "Lift that rock over there and start to dig. You will find water fresh enough to drink and clean enough to wash."

How she knew the spring was at that exact spot, no one knows. Divine intervention, perhaps? The spring has never stopped flowing, and its waters are today contained in a huge tank. Faucets have been installed so visitors can drink the spring water and collect some to take home. Many say the water has brought them healing—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I can attest to it being very refreshing on a hot day.

STAIRWAY TO THE SACRED HEART

During her last visit to the site, in 1912, Mother Cabrini, some nuns, and a handful of girls from the orphanage climbed to the top of the highest hill on the property. There the nuns and children arranged some white stones they found in the area into the shape of a heart. With smaller stones they made a cross to top the arrangement. Other stones were arranged to recall Jesus' crown of thorns. Mother Cabrini named the hill "Mount of the Sacred Heart." That stone Sacred Heart of Jesus still exists there, now encased in glass.

Today, the Stairway of Prayer follows the route Mother Cabrini and her entourage took to the top of the Mount of the Sacred Heart. The stairway was built in late 1954 and consists of 373 concrete steps. At its beginning are the Stations of the Cross. On a wooden cross at each station is a small mosaic, made in Italy, that depicts events on Christ's walk to his crucifixion.

At the top of the first flight of stairs there's a turn to the left, and the



Stations give way to the mysteries of the rosary. There are plenty of benches on the stairway to sit on to pray, meditate, and rest during the climb to the base of the gigantic statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

The 22-foot-tall statue was carved by an Italian artist and is positioned on an 11-foot-tall base. It stands right next to the stone Sacred Heart. The site affords a great view of Denver to the east.

STONE HOUSE, CHAPEL, AND GARDENS

During that same 1912 visit, Mother Cabrini met with a builder, Thomas Eckrom, to create the plans for the Stone House—a building that would serve as a dormitory for the girls while they were at camp and as a residence for the nuns. Built from native rock, the house is impressive even today. Each evening, the girls from the orphanage loaded a donkey-drawn cart with stones at a nearby quarry and hauled them to the building site. Construction was completed in 1914. Girls from the Queen of Heaven Orphanage used it as a summer camp until it was closed in 1967. The house then became a place for retreats and prayer gatherings.

The sisters moved out of the Stone House when their convent was completed in 1970. The convent, a three-story brick building, also contains the Chapel to the Sacred Heart, a gift shop, and a museum describing Mother Cabrini's life, along with some items she personally used.

Adjacent to the chapel is a set of stained glass windows that trace key moments in her life: her birth, the

TOP: The Sacred Heart of Jesus Chapel is open seven days a week, with regularly scheduled Masses. The chapel's central feature is a mosaic of the Sacred Heart of Jesus behind the main altar. BOTTOM: Part of a gravel path weaves its way through the manicured Cabrini Garden. The building in the background is the Cabrini Museum, which houses artifacts that were used by the saint.



founding of the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, her work with Italian immigrants, her death, and her 1946 canonization as a saint.

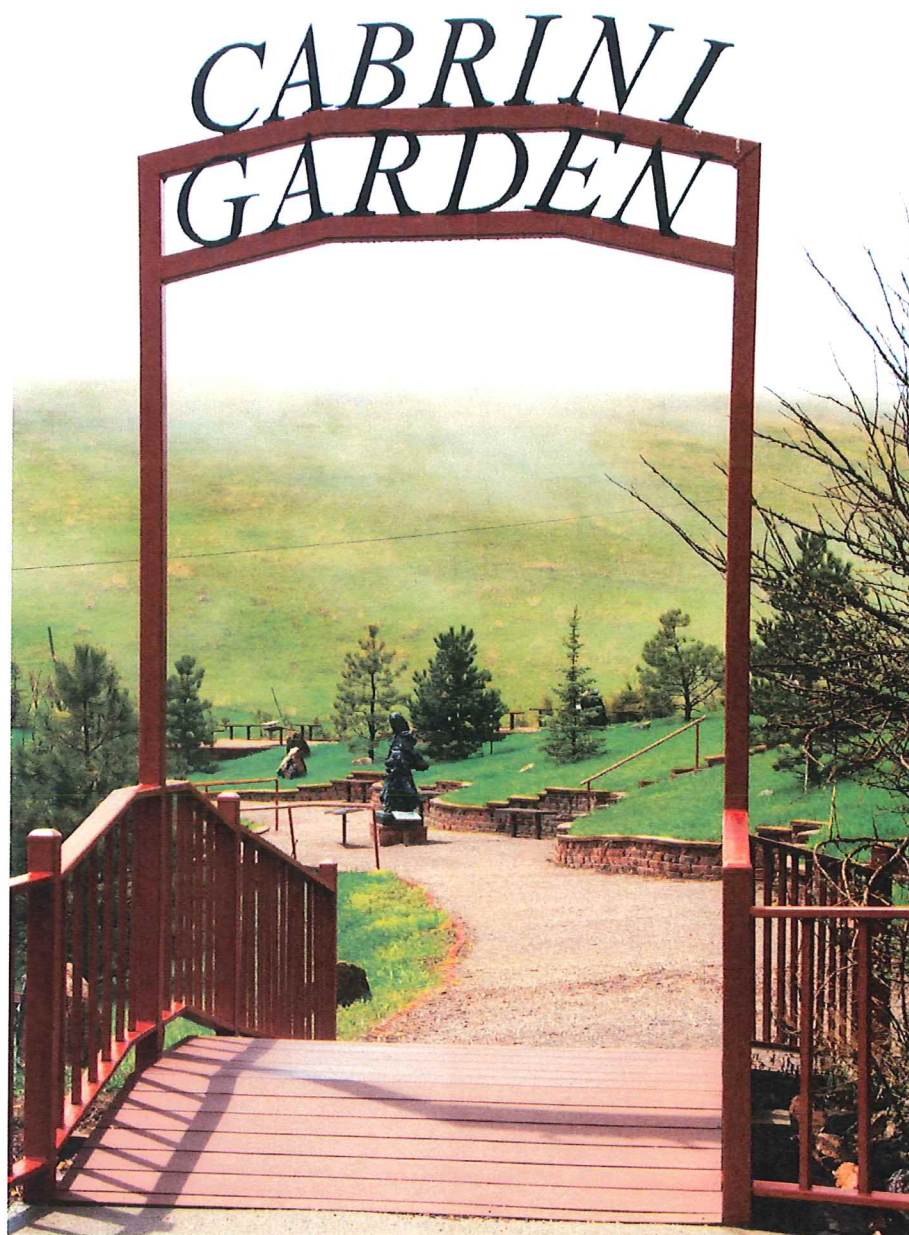
The Cabrini Garden and Grotto, the Rosary Garden, and the Meditation Walk are tranquil places to pray, meditate, and take in the natural beauty of the shrine. Near the spring is another special place for prayer and meditation—a grotto akin to that of Lourdes.

LEGACY OF LOVE

Mother Cabrini's heart was with the poor and downtrodden. Wherever she traveled, she inspired people to give of themselves to help others. She died at age 67 at Chicago's Columbus Hospital, which she founded. She left a legacy of 67 schools, hospitals, and orphanages worldwide.

What started out as a summer camp for orphans more than 100 years ago has become a place of prayer for some, a place of retreat for others, a place for anyone who wants a respite from the highway—and a shrine to her life and sainthood. **SAM**

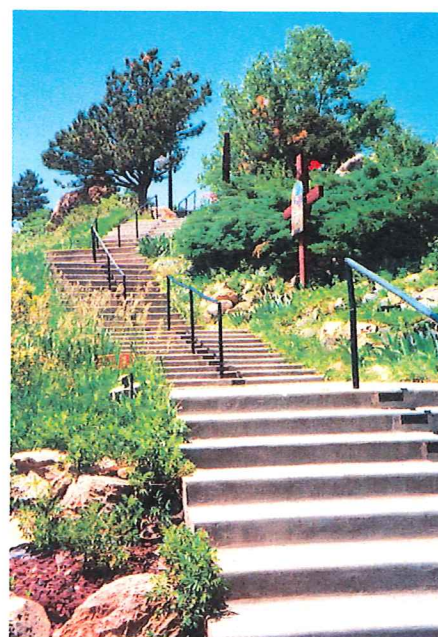
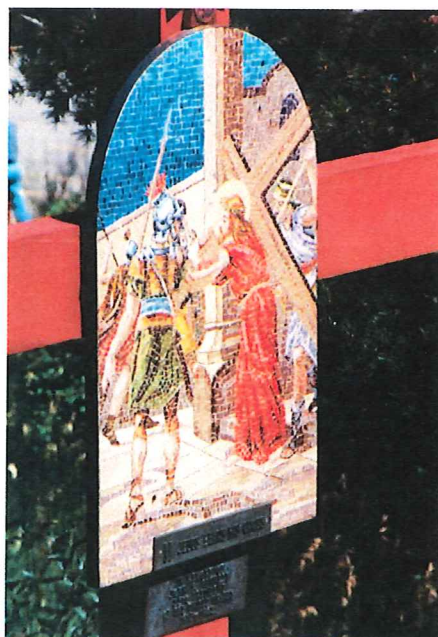
Richard Bauman is a writer and photographer who resides in West Covina, California. A self-described "history sleuth," Richard enjoys visiting, photographing, and writing about lesser-known historical sites across the United States.

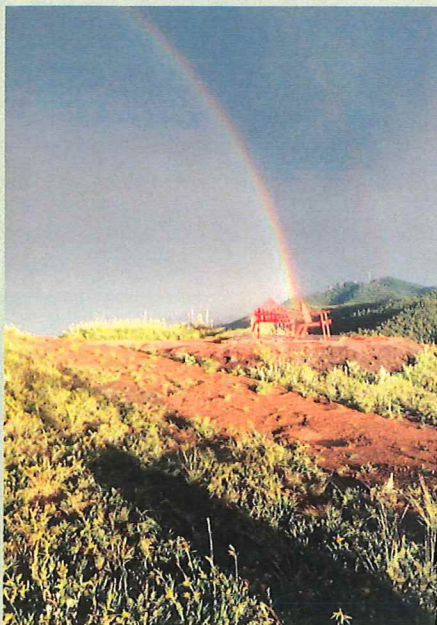


TOP: The Cabrini Garden is a meditative place devoted to depicting the life of the saint. In the center of the garden is a statue of Mother Cabrini and two orphans, which recalls the original use of the land as a summer camp for girls from Queen of Heaven Girls Orphanage in Denver.

BOTTOM LEFT: At each Station of the Cross on the Stairway of Prayer is a small mosaic depicting one of the scenes from Scripture. Pictured here is the Second Station, where Jesus takes up his cross.

BOTTOM RIGHT: The Stairway of Prayer follows the route Mother Cabrini, her fellow nuns, and a group of orphans took to the top of the mountain in 1912. The 373 steps of the stairway ascend to the statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus.





THE MOTHER CABRINI SHRINE is located in Golden, Colorado, just outside of Denver. It offers group or individual retreats, either overnight or one-day. Retreats are self-directed; the shrine provides the food and lodging. Several venues are available, including the Stone House, Hermitage, and chapel.

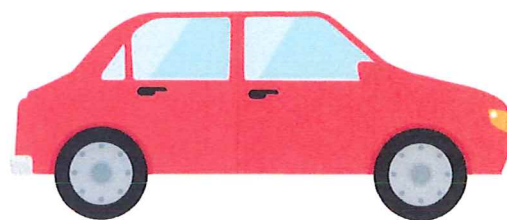
The address of the shrine is 20189 Cabrini Blvd., Golden, CO 80401. Masses can be scheduled at the shrine for weddings, anniversaries, quinceañeras, funerals, memorials, or other special occasions. The main chapel can hold up to 175 people.

The events listed above may be curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For current information about the shrine, special events, and hours of operation call **303-526-0758** or go to **MotherCabriniShrine.org**.



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