



A PILGRIMAGE TO ST. KATERI SHRINE

Story and photos by
KAREN A. AVITABILE

A visit to the 178-acre St. Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine and Historic Site in Fonda, N.Y., is an opportunity to be in the presence of Kateri Tekakwitha. She was a Native American woman who endured extreme loss, suffering and ridicule before deepening her love of Jesus and living a more Christian-focused life.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, who is referred to as the patroness saint of Native Americans and the Lily of the Mohawks, lived in Caughnawaga, an Indian village in Fonda, from 1666 to 1677. She died in 1680 at the young age of 24. Her remains are entombed in St. Francis Xavier Church on the Kahnawake Reservation in Quebec.

Because of the miracles and healing abilities attributed to St. Kateri, she was canonized on Oct. 21, 2012. She was the first Native American woman to be named a saint. Her feast day is celebrated on July 14.

Each year, roughly 2,000 pilgrims visit the shrine for a guided or self-guided tour. The conventual Franciscan Friars established the shrine in 1938 at the request of Rev. Edmund F. Gibbons, then the bishop of Albany, and continue its administration today. It wasn't until 1950 that Father Thomas Grassman began unearthing the Indian settlement a few

VISITING AN OLD FRIEND

A bus trip to St. Kateri Tekakwitha National Shrine and Historic Site on May 13, organized by St. Paul Parish in Kensington, was also an opportunity for parishioners to visit with their old friend, Father Timothy Lyons. Last August, Lyons, a Franciscan friar, left St. Paul to become the chaplain of the shrine in Fonda, N.Y.



Father Timothy Lyons.

"I feel challenged here," says Lyons, who had never visited the St. Kateri shrine before becoming its chaplain. "Ever since I've been here I've been doing a lot of research on St. Kateri, the Mohawks and their traditions."

Most people visit the shrine for a day of silence, peace and healing, Lyons says. "I am able to pray more and I feel my prayer more relaxed," he adds. "It's not as hectic as it was for me in a parish."



**THE SHRINE IS LOCATED AT
3636 STATE HIGHWAY 5 IN
FONDA, N.Y.**

HOURS OF OPERATION

Summer season

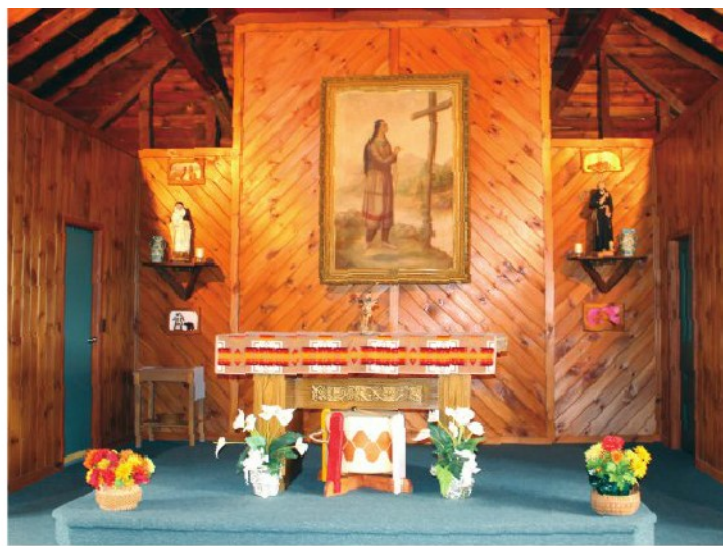
The summer season runs May 1 to Oct. 31. The candle chapel, St. Peter's Chapel, the museum, the outdoor sanctuary and hiking trails are open year-round, dawn to dusk. Vigil Mass is celebrated at 4:30 p.m. on Saturdays. Sunday Mass is celebrated at 10:30 a.m. The gift shop is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Fridays through Mondays. Office hours: 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays.

Winter season

The winter season runs Nov. 1 to April 30. The candle chapel, outdoor sanctuary and hiking trails are open year-round, dawn to dusk. St. Peter's Chapel, the museum and public bathrooms are closed. No Masses are celebrated. Access to the gift shop is by appointment only. Office hours: 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m., Mondays through Fridays.



St. Maximilian Pavilion.



St. Peter's Chapel.

miles away. This settlement is believed to be the only completely excavated Iroquois Indian village in the country.

Some people come to the shrine just to walk or hike the beautiful, serene grounds. Others stop for prayer and reflection at the statues or the Stations of the Cross located outside. Or, enjoy a picnic lunch while listening to songs by finches, woodpeckers and warblers. A small candle chapel is open at the entrance of the shrine. A memorial bell tower on the property was erected in 1982, with three bells cast in 1918. These bells pealed until 1972 in the original Blessed Sacrament church in Mohawk, N.Y.

Masses on weekends are celebrated in an outdoor shelter, called St. Maximilian Pavilion, at the shrine. During inclement weather or when some guided tours are given, Mass can also be held on the property in St. Peter's Chapel, where St. Kateri was baptized on April 5, 1676. St. Peter's Chapel and an impressive museum are both located in a 236-year-old barn that was renovated in 1938 under Father Grassman's direction. In the museum, a display of Native American artifacts from multiple tribes, including ones from the Iroquois, are displayed. A highlight of the museum is the large miniature replica of a Mohawk village.

To remember your pilgrimage to the St. Kateri Shrine, visit the gift shop on the property which carries a wide variety of St. Kateri keepsakes, other devotional items and fine art and craft work.

MOHAWK INDIAN VILLAGE

After leaving the shrine, drive four-tenths of a mile up the road across from Hickory Hill Road to see where the only archaeological-excavated Mohawk Village once stood. Also, St. Kateri's spring, where the water for her baptism was drawn, is still located on the property today. Many people have said they have been cured by the water in the spring. ☪



Candle chapel.



St. Kateri overlooks the grounds.

✚ **FOR MORE INFORMATION** about St. Kateri and her shrine, visit www.katerishrine.com.

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, Native American and Convert

FEAST DAY: JULY 14

St. Kateri Tekakwitha, who was given the name Tekakwitha, was born in 1656 to a Christian Algonquin mother and Mohawk father. At an early age, she embraced a life of gentle service to others. Born in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, she and her family contracted smallpox in an epidemic when she was a child; she was scarred from the disease and lost her family to it.

Although her uncle took her in, he treated Tekakwitha as a slave. She found solace, however, in listening to the blackrobes, or Jesuit missionaries, who visited her village and would meditate often on their teachings.

At the age of 19, Tekakwitha was baptized by the Jesuits (taking the name Catherine at her baptism), and then refused marriage in order to dedicate her life to God. After death threats from the villagers because of her Catholic faith, a priest recommended she flee from her village in upstate New York to a town near Montreal. After a 200-mile journey, she received her first Communion in 1677 and served her new village by teaching prayers to children, attending daily Mass and watching over the elderly and sick.

Many healings are attributed to Kateri's intercession. She died in 1680, just before her 24th birthday. Under Pope St. John Paul II, she was beatified in 1980 and she was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI at St. Peter's Basilica in 2012.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Kateri is the Mohawk form of Catherine, which she took from St. Catherine of Siena.
- She is the first Native American woman to be canonized.
- She is the patron saint of people in exile.



St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish to Install Statues of Patron Saint

By **SHELLEY WOLF**

In July, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish will celebrate the saint's feast day with three new statues. "In our continuing effort to unify our three worship sites into one community of faith," says Monsignor Vittorio Guerrera, pastor of the parish, "we recently purchased three statues of St. Kateri crafted in Italy and plan to place one in each church in anticipation for her feast day on July 14."

Formed in June 2017 through a merger, St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish is comprised of three worship sites: Sacred Heart in Kent (where the parish office is located), St. Bernard in Sharon and St. Bridget in Cornwall Bridge. About 300 registered families make up the parish.

The size of the parish has its benefits. "Given that we are that we are a small parish community, it is easier to get to know everyone and people look out for one another," Monsignor Guerrera says.

It is only fitting that St. Kateri is the patron saint of the parish, the monsignor adds, because she is definitely a saint for our times. "She was a young woman of deep, quiet faith who maintained her serenity in the midst of opposition from her family and other members of her tribe, who mocked her for her conversion to Christianity," he says. "She is a good role model for young people today who are trying to live their faith in the midst of the challenging times in which we live."

St. Kateri Tekakwitha Parish plans to honor the saint at its annual picnic on Sept. 8 at 11 a.m. in Macedonia State Park in Kent. This year, the parish is also organizing a pilgrimage to the National Shrine of St. Kateri Tekakwitha in Fonda, N.Y., so parishioners can learn more about their patron saint. **CT**