



## Last wish a divine legacy

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The dying wish of a quiet and faith-filled bachelor farmer came true this month. A jewel box of a shrine, surrounded by stained-glass windows, stands in Sublimity, across Church Street from the simple gray house where Vincent J. Etzel said he'd seen Jesus and the Virgin Mary.

Everyone who knew Etzel well knew he prayed every night. Kneeling in his kitchen, resting his arms on the cutting board, he said the rosary before he went to bed. But on Dec. 28, 1979, he finished his prayers, stood up and found himself surrounded by a cloud.

"I was not able to see anything," he wrote later. He smelled incense and burning candles, felt someone breathing on him. Suddenly, the cloud disappeared. Etzel fell to his knees and prayed for help. Later that night, before he turned out the light, the cloud came back and settled at the foot of his bed.

"Jesus and Mary appeared, looking down at me," he wrote. He could see the "big, loving heart" of each figure. He looked into their lifelike eyes. "Then all at once, they were gone,"

People have all sorts of visions, in their lifetimes and for the world they leave behind. The latter kind often require the help of another person, someone willing to fulfill the last wish of a loved one. And in Etzel's case, someone to keep his secret.

## To view

Sacred Hearts Shrine sits behind St. Boniface Catholic Church, 375 S.E. Church St., in Sublimity. For now, the shrine will be locked most of the time, but two benches allow visitors to look through a large glass window into the shrine. And at night, the chapel is lit from within to highlight the stained glass.

He didn't tell a soul about his vision for six years. In 1985, he described it to his niece, Carrie Etzel Durig, and swore her to secrecy. After his death, he told her, he'd leave her money to build a permanent shrine dedicated to the sacred hearts of Mary and Jesus.

For the next 23 years, Durig says she kept his wishes in her heart "It was hard not to tell anyone else, but he said he needed me to be his messenger."

Vince Etzel died in July 2008 at age 88. Durig devoted the next year to making her uncle's wish a reality. She researched shrines online, spoke with the Archdiocese of Portland and met regularly with a panel from her uncle's parish, St. Boniface Catholic Church in Sublimity. She chose a builder, consulted on the design, chose a spot on parish property and commissioned nine stained-glass windows. The finished Sacred Hearts Shrine cost more than \$120,000, and Etzel left an additional \$10,000 endowment for its maintenance. At the Sept. 13 dedication, the white clapboard church that generations of Etzels have attended was full to bursting. The Most Rev. Kenneth Steiner, auxiliary bishop of the archdiocese, was there, along with the only other people who knew of Etzel's vision: the Rev. Irudayaraj Amalanathan, his parish priest and Monsignor Arthur Dernbach, a former pastor. "I think it happens more than you realize," said Dernbach, 82, retired now in Beaverton. People have visions but keep them secret, afraid others won't believe them. But Etzel wrote his story several times over the years, Dernbach said, and the accounts never varied.

Pete Etzel, the youngest of Vince's seven siblings, remembers the "old-time pictures" of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They hung in his mother's sitting room on the Fern Ridge farm where five generations of Etzels have lived and worked.

"We'd say the rosary every night," Pete Etzel remembers. Sometimes, he admits, he'd fall asleep. But his older brother didn't. "Vince said the rosary was his shield."

## **Likeness of rosary**

A likeness of Vince Etzel's rosary runs through two of the nine stained-glass windows that Durig commissioned for the shrine. Neil Phillips, owner of Pugin, Hardman & Powell Ltd. of Birmingham, England, designed the windows and made his second trip to Sublimity for the dedication. His first was in the fall of 2008, when he came to meet the family and see the Etzel farm.

Durig wanted the artist to have a sense of what her uncle loved - Douglas firs, the view of Mount Jefferson from the farm, hunting elk. She described the crops that he had raised - strawberries, cherries, bush beans, plums and fescue.

Phillips captured it all in a pair of harvest windows. Four larger ones depict scenes from Jesus' life recounted in the rosary. Two others portray the sacred hearts of Etzel's vision. On clear days, the sun shines through the stained glass, casting red, green and blue light on white statues of Jesus and Mary. At night, the shrine reverses itself: Lit from within, the windows glow. One of them, a tiny round image of the Holy Spirit as a dove, shows only at night. For now, the shrine won't often be open; a large clear window allows visitors to see inside.

## **The dedication**

On the chilly, overcast Sunday of the dedication, Annita Harris of Springfield, Durig's sister and Vince's niece, remembered Christmas Eves she'd spent with her uncle. He was a reserved man, she said, with a great sense of humor. He prayed before a meal, wherever he might be.

"After his heart surgery, he could hear music," she said. "He thought it was angels singing and he'd say, 'Sometimes I have to tell them to turn it down; they're too loud.'"

Harris and the rest of Etzel's relatives gathered at his house the night he died. Durig told them of her uncle's last wish and passed out booklets he had created describing his vision.

"Over all these years," he wrote, "the details are so real in my mind. Jesus and Mary controlled my emotions and actions that night. They kept me calm and guided me in my decisions through life. . . . They answered my prayers through all these years to find the right people to reveal my vision to and helped me write this letter of my experience when they came to my House in a Special Vision." •