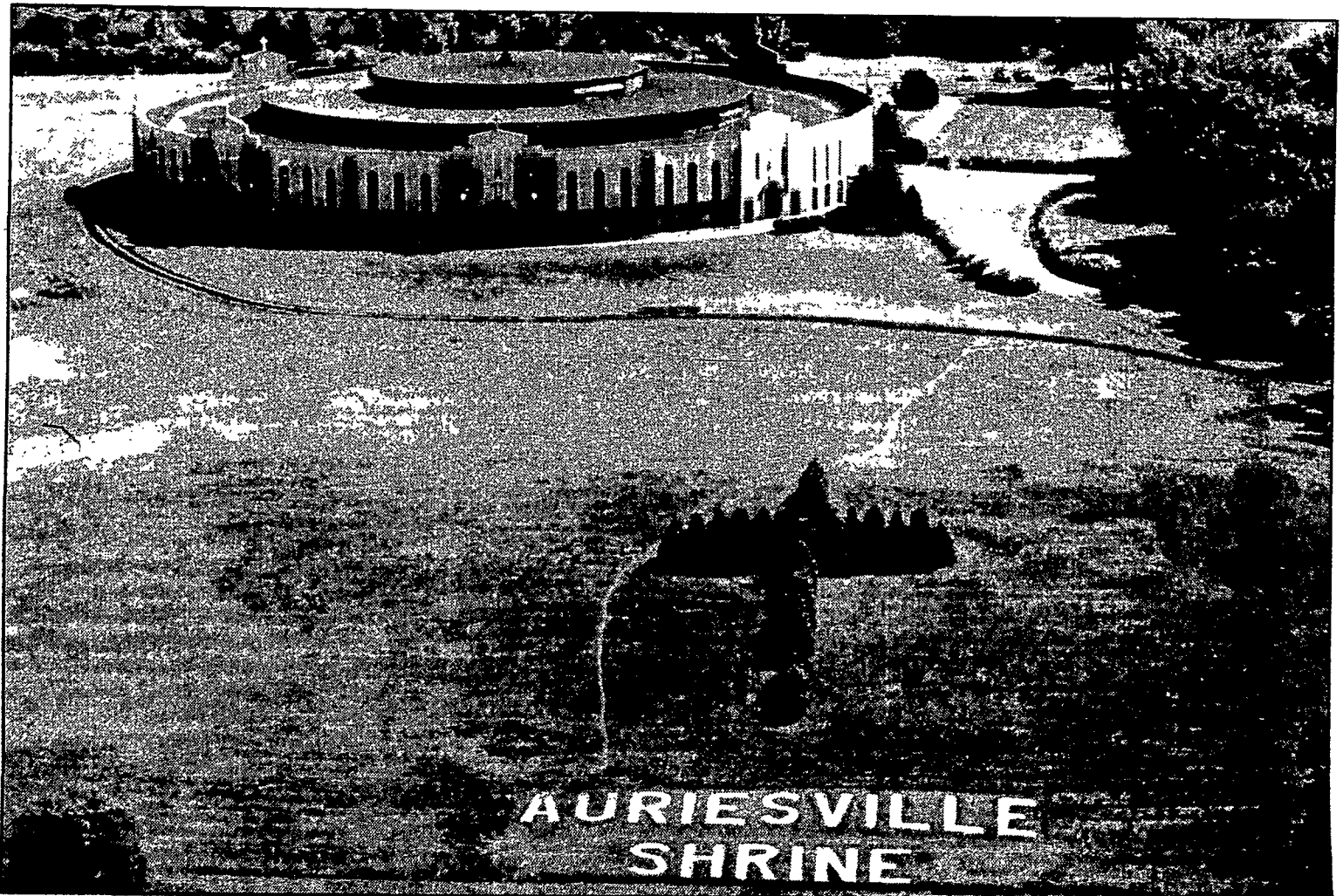


Pilgrimages & Travel

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The Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs at Auriesville, visible from the New York State Thruway, draws some 50,000 visitors a year. The Coliseum church, which can accommodate 6,500 people, is open for year-round devotion. File photo

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— Father Ciavaglia, Director,
Our Lady of Fatima Shrine

Area shrines await to provide spiritual fare

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

Some may opt for faraway places such as the Holy Land or Medjugorje to enhance their faith journey.

However, for those who would rather make a one-day religious pilgrimage — and still be home in time to catch the 11 p.m. news — several options are available near the Diocese of Rochester.

One popular and unique example can be found along the New York State Thruway near Albany. For the eye-weary, this site offers a real change of pace from billboards, farm fields and exit signs.

Many who visit the Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs have been enticed by the gigantic stone image spelling the words "Auriesville Shrine" across shrine property. Directly above these words is another eye-catching figure — like the letters, laid out on the lawn — in which trees form the image of a cross. Both are plainly visible from the Thruway.

"Visitors will say, 'We passed by and saw that cross, and we always said we were going to stop. Now, here we are,'" remarked Father John Pare, SJ, who serves as the shrine's director.

First-time attendees will be pleased to discover that the shrine offers a number of intriguing structures, beginning with the massive Coliseum church which can accommodate 6,500 people.

The shrine's grounds include several statues dedicated to three Jesuit missionaries — St. Rene Goupil, St. Isaac Jogues and St.

John LaLonde — who were all martyred by Mohawk tribes in the 1640s. They — along with five missionaries martyred in Canada — constituted the North American Martyrs who, in 1930, became the first saints of North America to be canonized.

Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs was begun in 1885 out of devotion to the Jesuit martyrs. It has been staffed by Jesuit priests throughout its history.

The Auriesville facility is also a center of devotion to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, who in 1980 became the first lay woman in North America to be honored by the church as "blessed." Born in 1656 in Auriesville, she performed extensive service to Christian Mohawk smallpox victims before her death near Montreal at the age of 24.

Devotion to Blessed Tekakwitha also takes place at the National Shrine of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha in Fonda, located seven miles from Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs at the site of Blessed Tekakwitha's baptism.

Father Pare — who also taught at Rochester's Mc-



File photo
The shrine features statues dedicated to three Jesuit missionaries who died as martyrs.

Quaid Jesuit High School from 1954 to 1960 — estimates that Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs hosts 50,000 visitors per year.

"We have people from almost all the states, and many foreign countries," Father Pare said.

Located between Thruway exits 28 (Fultonville) and 27 (Amsterdam) near Albany, Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs is in full operation

from May to October. The Coliseum church is open for year-round devotion.

Shrine of Our Lady of Martyrs and the National Tekakwitha Shrine are two of several Catholic shrines that can be reached within a day's drive to the east for travelers from the Rochester diocese. Heading west, another popular stop is the Our Lady of Fatima Shrine located in Youngstown, just seven miles from Niagara Falls.

Of the 300,000 people who annually visit the Fatima Shrine, its director noted, the international mix is as great there as for tourists at the nearby Falls.

"We get people from all over the world: Europe, Asia, South

America, all the continents," Father Julio Ciavaglia, CRSP, remarked. "And, surprisingly, even Muslims. It's not unusual to see Hindus walking around."

Fatima Shrine was begun in 1954 and is staffed by the Barnabite order. It was dedicated a national shrine in 1994.

Open year-round, the shrine offers a full slate of programs concluding with the Festival of Lights celebration. This year, said Father Ciavaglia, the brightly lit 20-acre property included an eight-foot-high Nativity scene made entirely out of lights.

Father Ciavaglia stressed that the shrine promotes itself as much more than simply a tourist's stop.

"We want to enhance all the spirituality we can here," he said.

Beyond the Canadian border, another shrine to keep on your travel itinerary is the Martyrs' Shrine in London, Ontario, north of Toronto. This shrine is open from May to October.

Martyrs' Shrine serves as the Auriesville shrine's Canadian counterpart, paying homage to the five aforementioned Canadian martyrs. In 1648 and 1649, all five saints — Jean de Brebeuf, Gabriel Lalement, Charles Garnier, Nobel Chabanel and Antoine Daniel — were martyred by the Huron tribe.

Other shrines located near the Rochester diocese include Our Lady of Victory National Shrine in Lackawanna, N.Y.; and St. Ann's Monastery Shrine in Scranton, Pa. There are also several shrines in the New York City and Montreal areas.