

# The Amazing Story of "Immaculata" The Statue of Mary at St. Dominic Church

By Sue Piqueira



The statue of Mary standing to the left as you face the altar of St. Dominic Church in Southington, CT has an amazing, faith-filled story behind it. The statue was brought to the United States largely through the efforts of Paulette Melican, a founding member of St. Dominic Church, after her life-changing first trip to Medjugorje\* in 1987. Deeply moved by the experience, Paulette felt she needed to do something for people who did not have the opportunity to visit Medjugorje, so far away in the heart of the Bosnia Herzegovina provinces of the former Yugoslavia.

After speaking to Fr. (Walter F.) Geraghty, then pastor of St. Dominic Church, Paulette decided to organize a day of renewal in Southington. Fr. Geraghty suggested doing it at St. Dominic which seats about 700. Paulette, **however**, was convinced that a larger site was needed. Together with Rosemary Page and other parishioners, Paulette arranged to hold the event at the Southington H.S. auditorium. Paulette invited noted author Wayne Weible as a speaker. **Weible's** first visit to Medjugorje on a journalistic assignment **had** so moved him spiritually that he converted to Catholicism and has dedicated his life to speaking and writing about Mary and the messages of Medjugorje.

With no funding, but with great faith in Mary, Paulette went forward with her plan and the word got out. With only 1,000 (no charge) tickets printed, over 2,400 expressed interest in attending, including people from neighboring states. On the day of renewal in September 1990, a packed auditorium witnessed the 9 am to 5 pm program. It was a great success; many were blessed with a renewed trust in God and a strengthened faith. **Just** one free-will offering paid all expenses of the huge undertaking.

Paulette invited Wayne back to her home where they prayed the rosary together before a small statue of Mary in her living room. At the end of the fourth decade of the rosary, Wayne stopped, remaining prostrate before the statue in silent prayer for some time. When he looked up, he told Paulette, in a clear voice, that Mary had requested twelve statues be made.

. Please turn page

The statues were to be replicas of the statue of Mary found in Tihaljina, a small town not far from Medjugorje, at the church of Fr. Jozo, the former pastor of St. James Church in Medjugorje. Fr. Jozo had been a great defender of the visionaries, the six children Mary had chosen to appear to each day. Wayne said that Mary asked that the statues be placed around the world and that the first one be brought to America. He also spoke the following words that touch Paulette's heart to this day: "Our Lady wants to know if you want the first one?" Paulette answered emphatically, "Yes!" In prayer, Paulette and Wayne asked Mary where in the U.S. the other eleven statues should be placed. Their hearts were assured that Mary would decide where she would have them placed. Now, Paulette had no way to pay for the statue, but she could not say "no" to such a request. Through prayer and trust, she raised \$3,500, the precise amount needed for the statue.

Wayne flew to Italy where he commissioned an artist to create the statue from a picture of Our Lady of Tihaljina, also called Our Lady of Grace. When the statue was completed, Wayne informed Paulette that the statue was to be named "Immaculata" with each of the 12 statues commissioned to bear a different name. This seemed providential to Paulette because the name of the retreat house where she worked for over 25 years was "Immaculata," a fact that Wayne had not known. Paulette prayed for guidance as to where the statue should be placed in America. Though Paulette at first assumed the statue would go to Immaculata Retreat House in Willimantic, she found herself repeatedly unable to approach the retreat director about it. When she told Fr. Geraghty she had raised the \$3,500 for the statue, he replied with conviction, "She needs to come here to St. Dominic Church." Paulette felt confirmation of this in her heart. In 1991, the statue of Mary, named Immaculata, arrived at St. Dominic Church in Southington, CT, fulfilling a promise Paulette and Wayne had made to Mary only a year before.

Paulette says that Mary has promised she will open hearts and bring peace to all who give her their hearts. At St. Dominic Church, the statue is an incredible blessing for the whole faith community and for those who've had the opportunity to kneel and pray before "Immaculata," Our Lady of Grace. Prayer before the statue is especially powerful. Mary's promise is that she will never forsake her children and that she will intercede for us with her Son.

\* Since 1981 the Blessed Virgin Mary has been appearing and giving messages to the world through six young visionaries. Since the apparitions began, millions of people, including Father May, have traveled to Medjugorje from all over the world and have left feeling strengthened and renewed in their faith.

Note: This story of a special moment in time in the treasured history of St. Dominic Church is presented by PICC, the Parish Information & Communications Center.