



A Jewel in the Desert

Sharon Kfa

In the late afternoon, richly colored beams of light touch the hands and faces of those who pass by the window just outside the Villa Maria Chapel. The stained glass window is low to the ground where those who are nearby or in wheelchairs can see the intense colors. As it gets closer to 4:00 pm, the trickle of people pushing wheel chairs or simply walking turns into a river. One by one they turn the corner and enter a different world, a world of gold and cream and wall murals and statues of Jesus, Mary and Joseph gazing compassionately at those who gather daily for worship.

The vision of continuing health care, together with spiritual care and religious services in a suitable setting with room for a possible chapel, began decades ago – when the Diocese of Tucson purchased the present site of Villa Maria Care Center and Assisted Living. With every square inch of space in the care center being at a premium, it is a minor miracle that the chapel survived the expansion of the original Villa Maria into a facility made up of cozy apartments and rooms that open on to a secluded patio.

Many years later, the inspired vision has borne fruit through the creative efforts, planning and funding of generous individuals. A jewel in the desert, the chapel is a feast for the eyes with its dim lights and muted colors; it is an oasis of peace and beauty and it is truly the spiritual hub of Villa Maria Care Center.

Catholic and Protestant services provide the valuable spiritual support needed and appreciated at this time of life. Interfaith services are held several days a week, but the strong thread that flows throughout the pattern of days is the daily celebration of Mass in the chapel. Every day! There are many churches throughout this country where the celebration of daily Mass has become a luxury.

Anyone who has come to worship in the chapel in the last 20 years has seen the calm and happy face of Sister Dorothy Ann Leshner. It was largely her determination that formed the Villa Maria Chapel Foundation to protect the chapel and its unique role. Sister Dorothy Ann struggled to win the designation of 501(c)(3) tax exempt status granted in 2008.

On the walls of the hallway outside the chapel there is a “Blessing Tree”. The many names of donors and memorials give testimony to the high esteem our Tucson community has for the chapel.

Sister Dorothy Ann is no longer employed in the Pastoral Care Department of Villa Maria, but rather she works with great enthusiasm and passion for the Villa Maria Chapel Foundation as Outreach Representative.

The most recent project to raise funds has been the creation of delicate wood rose bouquets and arrangements for special seasonal celebrations. These dollars pay for the stipends for priests and ministers and for the needed supplies of the chapel. Indeed, it is like opening a small church.

In the evening, the stained glass windows glow warmly and cast their blanket of color over the people who make their way into chapel. They would be grateful for any gift in support of the chapel, large or small. Please send checks to:

Villa Maria Chapel Foundation, 4310 E. Grant Road, Tucson, AZ 85719

