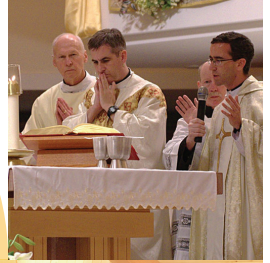


THE BALDACCHINO

CELEBRATE
the Sacraments...
A NEW
Beginning
FOR THE FAMILY

A Campaign for St. Mary Catholic Parish



Listen to Sylvia Talkington reflect on the role her father played in crafting the baldacchino for St. Mary, and hear the pride in her voice for a project completed nearly 60 years ago.

"He made it quite personal," Sylvia said. "He'd come home and sketch out how much wood he needed. He was very dedicated to St. Joseph and the Blessed Mother. He was quite humbled to be part of the new church building."

John Callie Smith – known by his middle name – was born and raised in Denver. As a young man in the 1940s, Callie honed his woodworking skills as an employee of Halleck and Howard Lumbermill. Like most healthy young American men from that era, he served during World War II. He returned to the lumbermill after the war and continued his artisan career.

"Dad went through the apprentice guild system," Sylvia said. "He was an Irish craftsman."

He was a humble, kind man who was devoted to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. He believed he was given a gift from God to be chosen to contribute in the only way he knew and could give.

That opportunity to assist St. Mary began to take shape in the late '50s. As the church population continued to climb, the building on Nevada Street became obsolete. Parishioners needed a larger faith home to accommodate 4,000 weekly worshipers. In July 1961, members broke ground for their new church and 14 months later, September of 1962, enjoyed dedication ceremonies.

Parishioners responded with excitement to their new faith home, furnishing it with personal donations. But for Callie, instead of an appliance for the kitchen or a desk for the office, he donated his time and craftsmanship and created his contribution. His work with Halleck and Howard allowed him to develop his craft. He worked on the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant chapels at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He understood how best to take a piece of wood, and craft it in such a manner to give it character – to give it appeal that warrants one's attention. As the only craftsman in Colorado who understood how to operate the machinery, which planed, smoothed and bonded the narrow strips used in forming the arch, Callie handled the assignment.

A baldacchino is a dome-like canopy, rectangular in framework, which serves as a crown for an altar, throne, pulpit, statue, etc. According to an online article from the Institute of the Sacred Architecture, baldacchinos were common features in early Roman Christian churches. They were the focus of the interior, a high altar surrounded by an architectural canopy, which mark its location, sending a message of special honor and drawing one's attention. In most of today's modern churches, baldacchino's are free-standing structures, featuring symbolic tones with biblical events related to the creation of a space of honor. (To know more, you can visit: sacredarchitecture.org)

The construction of St. Mary's baldacchino took time. Sylvia recalls completion taking roughly two years. To do the job correctly, Callie relied upon



Sylvia Talkington stands at St. Mary's baldacchino built by her father.

his training, his precise skills and his dedication to his craft.

"He'd strip a log and plane it down, then stick it and join it to form the arch," Sylvia said. "He would go with the foreman to make sure the lumber used would be the dimension and feet he needed. He would go to the railyard to access the incoming flatbeds to see the number of board feet that arrived to see if it was straight. They knew from plans how much board feet they needed and would order it."

Decades later Callie's work remains on display, resting outside the nave, hovering over the baptismal font and serving as a source of considerable pride for Sylvia who lovingly recalls her father and his love for his Lord.

"Of course, he's there, in memory, in prayer, his presence is there in all his work," Sylvia said. "It's a reminder of his faith to the sacred heart of Jesus and the blessed Mary."