



## Small Council, Enormous Tribute

There is a small town in North Georgia that sits astride Interstate 75 approximately halfway between Atlanta and Chattanooga. As with most small towns, Calhoun, Georgia is quiet, peaceful, and not known for much insofar as American History is concerned. Though some deference is due to the fact that Sherman stormed through here on his way to Atlanta, Calhoun boasts nothing of significance in light of the tremendous history offered by the rest of the state.

50 years ago, a small group of Roman Catholics had the audacity to start a small group of worshipers in Calhoun despite the standoffish nature tendered by many of the town's original inhabitants. 25 years later, the small chapel of St. Clement would be erected to serve the small number of parishioners that had chosen to call Calhoun their home. Currently, St Clement serves over 700 Roman Catholic families.

St. Clement sits on Georgia State Highway 53 on the right side of the road as you leave the city traveling north on the highway towards Rome. It is a scenic chapel and sits prominently upon a little hill sporting a white stucco façade and a red roof. Those seeing it for the first time are charmed by its small-town charisma. Those entering inside for the first time are immediately enchanted by its spectral and modest beauty. St Clement always receives repeat visits from parishioners off of Highway 75 from all the states in the union—a testament to its parochial charm.

If one walks to the front of the church on the side facing the highway, he or she immediately sees a monument of stark white beauty. Sitting on a gray granite block rests a statue of two hands cradling a newborn baby. The monument sits in the center of a lush garden of flowers and trees atop a red stone foundation inscribed with the Templar Cross Pate'. The Statue is a dazzling white and sits within a protective tempered glass case reinforced with metal ribs. The whole monument sparkles like a diamond in the evening sunset and is immediately visible to all motorists as they drive by the church. On the front of the granite obelisk are inscribed the words taken from Isaiah 49:15, "*I will not forget you...I have held you in the palm of my hand.*" The Biblical script allows the reader to imagine the hands of God cradling a new baby about to be placed into a mother's loving womb. One can also see the Cross of the priests of the order of LaSalette as well as the symbol of the Knights of Columbus engraved upon the stone. Placed around the monument are stone benches provided for those who wish to sit and contemplate or

commune with God. At night, the whole monument glows under the soft illumination of several small spotlights.



When the Knights of Columbus Council 9339 established its headquarters at St Clement in 1986, it boasted the minimum number of members to form a council. Over the years, this council has never had over 60 members—only in the last 10 years has the number crept over 50. However, this did not detract the founding members from creating big plans to place a monument in front of the church to honor the multitude unborn citizens--both living and deceased--of God.

The idea for this monument formed during the first year of the council’s existence. Many man-hours of research were put in by the Knights to create the epic monument envisioned by the council members. The quest for the perfect monument had to:

1. more than adequately communicate the dignity and reverence envisioned by the creators,
2. become a one-of-a-kind obelisk of beauty not seen before,
3. be within the financial and manpower limitations of the council,
4. conform to the Parish’s standards of space availability,
5. not become what many might see as a “high-classed tombstone”.

Certainly, the council had a monumental task ahead!

Sadly, bids for the monument went as high as 50,000 dollars and more. Statues and stone obelisks available at the time were either too costly or not within the standards of the council with respect to beauty and dignity. Many of the available statues were already sitting in various locations in the United States, and although beautiful, were not one-of-a-kind.

Years of fundraising followed. Though successful considering the size of the council, the money collected was nowhere close to the anticipated cost of the project. It was at this moment that God intervened. The Council decided to try to hire an artist to sculpt a model out of plaster. Such an artist was found in the person of Ginni Jacobs, a retired art

teacher from Gordon County High School whose grandfather had been instrumental as one of the original architects of St Clement. The Knights contacted Ginni and presented her with a plan for the look of the statue that would sit atop the monument. Ginni accepted the challenge with great trepidation and agreed to take on the project for the small amount that the Council was willing to pay. It took Ginni a little over one year to create the masterpiece now sitting out in front of the church. When a Knight first saw the completed sculpture, a tear escaped his eye as he said, 'Ginni, you've given our idea a soul in which to reside!' When the local pastor first glanced at the work, he was so overtaken by emotion that he was speechless for ten minutes. Ginni never accepted the pay for the monument saying that too much of her ability had been transferred to the sculpture and that it would not be right for her to receive pay for this labor of love.

The obelisk is a granite rock from the mountains of North Georgia provided by a local dealer at an extremely low cost due to the fact that it was for a worthy cause. Sadly, this local vendor went out of business within the year, but his contribution to our monument would never be forgotten. The monument was first assembled as facing the church, but after much debate, the council decided to face the monument towards the highway so that all could marvel at its beauty. This action was beneficial. A motorist soon contacted the council. This passer-by was a Protestant from a local Church that was so enamored with the statue that he offered to build a protective glass enclosure to guard the structure from accident and the elements. Sadly, the monument had suffered minor damage over the years and the offering for a protective covering was well-received.



The statue took another year to fix and during that time, the stone obelisk stood a lonely vigil while the protective glass covering took shape around it. Visitors and

parishioners alike often complained to the Council to bring back their monument! Indeed, the very soul of the Council seemed to leave with the monument, as it seemed to suffer a very hard time conducting business in its absence. However, the monument was eventually placed back and with it, the spirit of the Council seemed to refresh anew. The Statue was blessed again during a special mass, and the grounds around the monument were again consecrated upon placing the monument back in place.



The original foundation for the monument was poured in August of 1998. The obelisk and statue were placed in September of that year. In October of 1998, two priests and a deacon with a healthy contingent of 4<sup>th</sup> Degree Knights in full regalia formally placed the statue onto the obelisk and conducted a consecration of the site.\* The monument took shape over the years through the diligent efforts of the Knights of Council 9339 and the people of the Parish. Knights poured the cement for the foundation and laid the brickwork. Knights designed and built the intricate concrete floor surrounding the monument. Knights landscaped and planted the shrubs and trees growing around the structure. Electrical lights and a sprinkler system would eventually round out the entire production which would produce a monument fitting in its beauty as well as its arboreal charm.

Many in our Parish and in our Council share a special bond with this monument because of personal loss involving the unborn and newly born, and for that reason it is diligently supplied with growing flowers and its grounds are surreptitiously manicured. Over the following years, this monument has received praise from people not only from the other states of the union, but from international visitors as well. Indeed, churches from as far as New England have contacted the council for permission to reproduce the monument for their own parishes. Many visitors from out of town re-visit every year just to see the monument. The monument has gathered admirers from all Christian faiths and continues to be an act of tremendous faith, love, and Knightly perseverance.



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\*(See the *Calhoun Times*, Volume 129, Number 25, November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1998 issue for a full feature story involving the original consecration ceremony of the monument)

Knights of Columbus Council 9339

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