



Branches on the Vine

DECEMBER 6 - 12, 2025



This image of Our Lady of Guadalupe will be on display in the sanctuary of Sacred Heart Parish from Dec. 7 to 14. Pictured, from left to right, are Father Joseph Keough, along with Caroline and Mike Alexopoulos, members of the Sacred Heart Parish family who were among those who went on a pilgrimage to Mexico City. SUBMITTED PHOTO



Hundreds of people are dancing to drums in traditional native dress in the plaza in front of the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. PHOTO BY FATHER JOSEPH KEOUGH

HOW A PILGRIMAGE TO MEXICO SPARKED A PRIEST'S PASSION FOR THE GUADALUPE FEAST

When Father Joseph Keough, pastor of Sacred Heart Parish in Suffield, traveled to Mexico City earlier this month, he expected a meaningful pilgrimage. What he didn't expect was how his visit to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe would impact him and shape his plans for the parish's upcoming feast day celebration.

"It was something I always wanted to do," he says. "My dad always had a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother. It's an image of her I wanted to learn more about, especially the Miracle of the Tilma."

Keough joined a group organized by Verso Ministries, traveling with two parishioners and others from across the United States. The group spent five days exploring the sacred sites connected to the apparitions of Our Lady to St. Juan Diego. To understand the significance of these sites, it helps to recall the story at the heart of the devotion.

In 1531, Juan Diego reported apparitions of the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac Hill in Mexico City, who asked for a shrine and proved her message by imprinting her image on his tilma when he presented miraculous winter roses to the bishop. The image -- unchanged

for centuries despite its fragile material -- carries indigenous symbols, accurate constellations from the day of the apparition, microscopic human reflections in the eyes, and scriptural parallels, leading many to see it as a miraculous, divinely created sign.

"What moved me most was seeing how the apparition brought unity," Keough says. "Our Blessed Mother spoke to both the native people and the Spanish explorers, and her message -- 'I am your mother, and you are my son' -- led to conversion and healing. It really was an important trip. Americans need to see this, experience it, and learn about it."

He was also struck by the symbolic depth of the image.

"Everything on the tilma has meaning -- the stars on her mantle reflect the night sky of Dec. 12, 1531," Keough explains. "There's a heavenly message embedded in every detail."

The experience inspired him to create a more intentional and joyful celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Sacred Heart this year on Dec. 12. Before leaving for Mexico, he asked parishioners if they had prayer intentions he could bring to the Basilica.

"More than 200 people responded," Keough says. "When I came back, so many thanked me. There's a real excitement about it in the parish."

Sacred Heart Parish's Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Sacred Heart Church on Dec. 12 will begin with Eucharistic Adoration from 7:30 to 8 a.m., followed by Mass at 8 a.m., which will be livestreamed on the parish Facebook page. Father Keough will preach a special Guadalupe-themed homily, reflecting on his pilgrimage and the message of trust and closeness to Christ through the Blessed Mother.

An image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, provided by a parish family, will be displayed prominently.

In the afternoon, the parish hopes to host a brief devotional program highlighting key moments from the pilgrimage and the history of the apparition.

The simple, but profound message behind the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe resonates in the lives of parishioners today. "That message of trust and drawing closer to our Lord through his mother," Keough adds. "I am your mother, you are my son."

- Story by Jim Tierney



Upcoming Events



13 Day Greece & Turkey Pilgrimage

Athens ♦ Greek Isle Cruise ♦ Istanbul



12/10 & 11 WEDS / THURS 10AM-4PM

**ADVENT BAKING RETREAT:
CARDAMOM BUNS AND CINNAMON
ROLLS, WITH PAM HARDIMAN**

Holy Family Retreat Center, 303 Tunxis
Rd, West Hartford

On December 10th or 11th, come join us at Holy Family Retreat Center, to take a break from the holiday rush and bake fresh, warm cardamom buns and cinnamon rolls to enjoy on Christmas morning. We will make ornaments for our trees while the dough is rising. \$75, includes lunch. **860-760-9705**.



12/9 TUESDAY 7:30PM

AMARCORD CONCERT

St Peter Claver Church

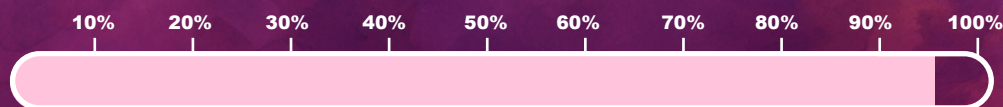
47 Pleasant St, West Hartford

Saint Peter Claver proudly presents the world famous German a cappella vocal ensemble, AMARCORD, in a very special Christmas program on Tuesday, December 9 at 7:30 PM. General admission tickets available at \$40. Please join us at one of their rare American appearances for an unforgettable musical event. Tickets are sold on-line only at spcknightsfundraiser.ludus.com



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