

# Nun seeks more modern shrine relics

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MARIA STEIN — Sister Regina Albers remembers coming to the Maria Stein Shrine of the Holy Relics as a child and looking in amazement at rows of reliquaries or display vessels containing relics of saints who lived long ago.

She now serves as curator of the collection numbering more than 1,000. Her goal since receiving the assignment in 2001 has been to acquire the relics of modern-day saints.

A relic of St. Jeanne Jugan, founder of the Little Sisters of the Poor, is

the newest acquisition that became part of the display in 2010. She served as a role model for caregivers tending the poor, the sick and the aging.

Other acquisitions in recent years include a strand of hair from Mother Teresa of Calcutta and a piece of cloth from Pope John XXIII.

Pope Francis announced in early July that the prelate who sponsored the Second Vatican Council had been approved for sainthood. No date has been set as yet for canonization ceremonies.

Mother Teresa, who founded the Missionaries of Charity, is known for

her dedication to the poor, homeless and infirm. Her beatification represents the final step before sainthood.

Sister Regina works with archdiocesan officials to request relics from an agency in Rome, pointing out she requests far more than she receives. The Maria Stein relic collection is the second largest in the United States behind St. Anthony Chapel in Pittsburgh, Pa.

Each relic in the collection has a story as well as documentation — certificates of authenticity accompany each.

St. Maximilian Kolbe was a priest

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## Relics

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who defied government mandates that the faithful not gather for Mass and prayer. He was taken into custody and sent to Auschwitz. Camp officials had a rule that 10 men died for each person who escaped. He reportedly took the place of a man who had a wife and family.

Moving through the chapel, Sister Regina stops at the relic of St. Damian of Molokai. As a young priest, he offered to serve at a leper colony, knowing he would never be permitted to leave the island compound.

The curator points out the collection contains three types of relics. Pieces of bone and even a hair taken from the body of a saint are considered first class

relics while something the person used like clothing constitutes a second class relic. Something that touched a first class relic like a rosary or a cross is assigned third class ranking.

Roughly 95 percent of the relics enshrined at Maria Stein are considered first class, according to Sister Regina.

"The church is very exact when it comes to obtaining relics," the nun explained. "Authenticity is safeguarded because we do not want anything that could be fraudulent."

Each relic is sewn into a capsule-like container with red silk thread. A drop of hat wax is placed on the knot along with the official seal. The accompanying certificate written in Latin comes with a matching seal.

"We know the relics we receive from Rome are authentic," she added. "You can buy relics on eBay these days but I would question their authenticity."

There is no cost for obtaining a relic other than the price of the display vessel and special shipping. However, recipients must promise to place the relic on display for veneration.

"Relics date back to early days of Christianity," Sister Regina said. "In times of religious persecution, people gathered to pray in the catacombs — the final resting place of martyrs."

In later years the faithful carried bones from the underground graves to venerate in newly built churches.

The local shrine was founded in 1875 when the Rev. J.M.

Gartner entrusted his collection of relics he rescued from Rome to the Sisters of the Precious Blood. The chapel, with hand-carved wood altars and stained glass windows from Munich, Germany, was built in 1892.

Sisters in residence provided around-the-clock adoration during bygone days. Now the relic chapel and adjacent adoration chapel are open Mondays through Thursdays from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. as well as Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

"People come by the thousands each year to worship here in the chapel," Albers said. "Some pray to favorite saints, patron saints of special causes like cancer or all the saints asking them to intercede on their behalf."