



# SHIFTING SANDS



## Grand Commander's Message

### A short drive away

Recently Marla, Meagan and I had the opportunity to attend Sunday Mass at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. While I had been at the Basilica a number of years ago, I had forgotten how beautiful it was. I also didn't realize that it is the largest Catholic Church in North America, it is one of the ten largest churches in the world, and it receives almost one million visitors annually.

Pope Pius X originally approved plans for the National Shrine in 1913 and the first Mass was celebrated on Easter Sunday 1924. Work on the National Shrine is expected to be completed in December, 2017, when the Trinity Dome, composed of more than 14 million pieces of glass, is completed.

The Mass was a moving and enriching experience which was heightened by the magnificent organ. After Mass we took the opportunity to view the over 70 chapels and oratories that are located on the main level and on the crypt church level. The self-guided tour provided a wonderful opportunity to view the cultures and traditions of the Catholic faith. We found the two gift shops to be interesting since they offer a variety of books, gifts, and religious items intended to make an individual's faith more meaningful.

We also decided to tour the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America since it is located only a few blocks from the National Shrine. The monastery was founded in

1899 by the Franciscan friars and is located on 43 acres. The monastery consists of a Byzantine style church and impressive gardens with almost 1,000 roses in addition to an assortment of interesting plants.

The grounds also contain replicas of several Holy Land shrines and the Lourdes Grotto. A portico surrounds the church and contains plaques showing The Hail Mary in almost two hundred languages. Free tours of the church and grounds are given throughout the year. While the grounds are attractive during any season, they are particularly impressive in the spring when the roses and specimen plants are in full bloom.

As I was driving home I reflected on how fortunate we are to have the National Shrine and the Franciscan Monastery in the Washington area. While thousands of domestic and international pilgrims travel to these two spiritual locations each year, we have the opportunity to gain a better understanding and a deeper appreciation of our Catholic faith only a short drive away.

As we approach the Advent Season, I can't think of a better place to spend a few hours of reflection than at either of these two "national treasures".

*Grand Commander Bill Mundy*