

The most recognizable and beautiful part of Our lady of Guadalupe church is the amazing stained glass window of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Here is the story of that stained glass window:

Almost 5000 stained glass pieces are in the window, a historical mural bearing the story of Our Lady's appearance to a Native American, Juan Diego, in Mexico in the sixteenth century. Perceived as an Indian, she left this likeness of herself on Juan's tilma, a cloak made of woven plant fibers. The window also pictures the roses which bloomed there out of season.

There is in the window a wealth of detail, including a Cherokee village with a council house. The face of the kneeling man resembles the only known picture of Sequoyah, who taught his people to read and write.

Hearing 86 syllables in spoken Cherokee, he invented a symbol for each syllable which enabled people to learn to write and understand the written language in a few days' time.

Sequoyah's syllabary is the only written American Indian language which does not use the more familiar 26-letter alphabet and consequently does not require any knowledge of English.

The story of the church's design is interesting too. Strong ties with native American culture that should appeal to visitors in our mission.

The church of Our Lady of Guadalupe connects indoors and outdoors, nature and history. Morning, noon and night, the stone and earth and trees, sky, mountains, valleys, stars and lightning join the traditional symbols of the Church to declare the glory of God.

The building itself combines traditions. It was dedicated August 15, 1966. The seven sides are reminiscent of the council house which would have been found in each Cherokee village before the forced removal to the west in 1838. Such a council house had a section of seats for families in each clan, facing a council fire in which burned wood from seven different kinds of trees. In this sanctuary, the vigil flame burns constantly.

As you approach the altar, you will find embedded in the floor symbols of those ancient clans - the Deer, Long Hair, Paint, Wolf, Bird, Wild Potato and Blue - designed by a Cherokee, Watty Chiltoskey. Another Cherokee artist, G. B. Chiltoskey, carved the symbols of the seven sacraments placed in the panel surrounding the tabernacle of Christ's presence, near the stained glass window which makes up the north wall. A parishioner, T. J. Dupree, built the panel from a previous altar railing.

There is in this congregation a special devotion to Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha, a young Mohawk woman who died in 1680. We participate with parishes from other Indian tribes in the revival which is resulting from a new Catholic appreciation of Indian spirituality, and representatives of the parish attend the yearly conference which draws together many hundreds of Native American Catholics from the U.S. and Canada.

The parish membership is very small. It is a joy to be joined by visitors. Outreach is extensive. Today the church is staffed by the Diocese of Charlotte.

Contributed by Lois Hornbostel from the writings of Sr. Roberta