

# A Sanctuary from Mall Madness: O. Carms on the North Shore in MA



St. Therese Carmelite Chapel and Gift Shop in the North Shore Mall in Peabody, MA. (Staff Photo)

A North Shore mall has been a spiritual oasis for shoppers for 40 years. Peabody - The soft music that greets visitors to the St. Therese Carmelite chapel creates an atmosphere of tranquility. Devotional candles burn under statues of the saints, and kneeling benches offer an open invitation for the sorrowful to shed their burdens.

It's hard to imagine, but this place of quiet reflection lies in the midst of a world of bustling commerce - a short distance from many crowded retail shops, one floor down from Joe's American Bar & Grill, across the hall from Friendly's restaurant. St. Therese is located on the lower level of the North Shore Shopping Center.

The chapel claims to be the first in the nation built in a mall; it has been a spiritual oasis for shoppers for 40 years. With three Masses per day & frequent opportunities for confession, the chapel, visitors say, is a place to find God where people don't usually look.

"You've got Capitalism with capital 'C' upstairs, and Religion with a capital 'R' downstairs," said chapel visitor Jack Reynolds, 70, of Hamilton. "In some ways, they never mix. But they should."

The chapel was founded in 1960 by Cardinal Richard Cushing during a move to "bring God into the marketplace." Today, similar chapels are scattered around the country, including a Carmelite chapel in the Bergen Mall in Paramus, NJ.

The North Shore chapel is staffed by six retired Carmelites; the prior, Charles Countie, is, at age 66, the youngest by far.

Countie said the chapel's unusual location is one of its key strengths, offering people who are looking for the material a path to the eternal. "We're a witness to something else," he said. "The upstairs is full of glitz. Down here is the presence of God."

Attendance at the chapel ranges from 50 to 100 for the daily Mass to a full house of 360 on the weekends. Convenience is a big draw, because many parishes don't hold daily Masses or are closed during the day.

"This is putting God in our lives in an everyday capacity," said Martin Monahan, 75, of Peabody. "It's a wonderful thing."

Anonymity is appealing for some, Countie said. People who park their car in a crowded mall lot when they come to reveal their sins during confession know they could be mistaken for

eager shoppers. Not once, Countie said with a laugh, has anyone confessed to overspending upstairs.

The Carmelite chapel has survived the various transformations of the mall, which started as an outlet shopping center, was later covered and then, in 1993, redeveloped. A petition drive helped save the chapel that year when the new owner considered shutting it down. The chapel pays its lease with donations and profits from an adjacent gift shop.

The chapel's existence still comes as a surprise to many shoppers, Countie said. Its plain-lettered sign is easily lost in the bright lights and buzz.

"I come here a lot. I've never heard of it. I've never seen it," said Ann Stanley, 59, of Ipswich. "All I see is kids running around without parents."

Still, many people find their way to the mall chapel. "Sinner, saints, the prayerful, the curious, they all come down," Countie said. "There's never been a target audience," said business manager Tom Tighe. "It's really open to anyone and everyone."

Maryellen McGee, who worked at Orange Julius at the North Shore mall, remembered visiting the chapel during hectic times at the frozen juice-drink vendor. "It was a tremendous contrast in pace," McGee, 52, of Topsfield, said after a recent visit to the chapel with her two daughters. "It was just a place to catch your breath and think about things."

Many chapel attendees don't know each other, but regulars sometimes meet for coffee in the food court after Mass. To them, a mall chapel doesn't seem unusual. Said Marie Brown, 76, who has attended the chapel for 38 years: "To me, there is no mall."

**Jay Lindsay**  
Associated Press

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## Carmelite Has Major Role in Thérèse's Visit to Philippines

*Sr. Joy speaks to 10,000 at gathering*

Joy Carmel Junawan, CSOL, was selected to give the principal address at the Sports Complex when the relics of St. Thérèse of Lisieux were in the Philippines. Sr. Joy belongs to the Carmelite Sisters of Our Lady. She was chosen for this by the Bishop and a committee.

The relics were in Dumaguete City for about 22 hours. The Carmelites spearheaded the preparation and activities connected with the visit of the relics to this particular diocese. A crowd of over 10,000 came. Another 5,000 were at the airport for the departure ceremony.

During the stay in the diocese, the relics were in the Cathedral for an hour and then brought to the Carmelite monastery in Sibulan overnight. People came continuously to venerate them throughout the night.

Sr. Joy studied with the Carmelites in Rome and in Washington, DC. The Carmelite Sisters of Our Lady were founded on February 1, 1982 by two former Sisters of the Dixie Carmelites. They were affiliated to the Order on December 8, 1994.

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