

All Souls Day preparations: Central Arkansas Catholics unite to clean diocesan cemetery

written by Malea Hargett |



When parishioners attend the All Souls Day Mass at Calvary Cemetery in Little Rock Nov. 2, they will see that new life has been infused into one of the oldest cemeteries in Arkansas. On Oct. 27 about 300 parishioners from parishes in Little Rock, North Little Rock and Benton as well as students from Mount St. Mary Academy and Catholic High School spent most of the day scrubbing and power-washing headstones, raking leaves and painting a 3,559-foot black wrought iron fence.

The work was organized by Christ the King Church in Little Rock as part of a city-wide ecumenical service project called Sharefest.

The former 30-acre pasture was donated to the "Catholic Church of Little Rock" in 1823.

Calvary Cemetery was deeded to the Diocese of Little Rock when the diocese was established in 1843.

It features several areas of importance, including a memorial to unborn babies, the Garden of Angels to honor babies that died during a miscarriage and the Priest's Circle, where more than 40 priests are buried.

Calvary Cemetery still serves those families who cannot afford to bury their loved ones. The "Babyland" section is located next to one of the fences unmarked. The Diocese of Little Rock donates burial plots to those families as well.

Jeff and Natasha Hart, members of Our Lady of Fatima Church in Benton, first learned about Babyland when their son, Tyler Allen, died a stillborn in June. Jeff Hart and his parents, Mike and Gwen Hart, chose to dedicate Saturday morning to improving Babyland. The family bought grass for the area and each headstone was power-washed. Another family donated a garden bench.

Gwen Hart said the family would like to purchase a memorial stone saying "Children of God Yet Ever in our Hearts" to mark the area.

"We come here all the time," said Mike Hart, whose grandparents, parents and sister are

interred in Calvary. "We bring the grandkids and say a prayer. It's important for them to know about life and death."

"It brings a lot of comfort to us," Gwen Hart said. "This really wasn't a pretty area and we wanted to fix it up."

Many parishioners in central Arkansas have a long-time connection to Calvary Cemetery and many Sharefest participants said they wanted to honor their deceased relatives.

"I've been coming here all my life," said Rose Cranford of Holy Souls Church, whose uncle was buried there in 1944 and later joined by Cranford's mother and grandparents. "(My husband, Deacon) Bill and I will be buried over there somewhere."