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REPRINT

OCTOBER 12-18, 2008

Volume 84, No.40

## ‘The Faithful Traveler’

### New Travel Show Seeks to Put Spirit in Adventure

BY JOSEPH PRONECHEN

**T**urn on the Travel Channel or pick up a travel book and what do you find? Adventure, beaches, cruises, food and wine tours.

“The Faithful Traveler” hopes to supply what seems to be missing: spiritual destinations.

Husband-and-wife team David and Diana von Glahn are writing and filming this travel series with a fully Catholic focus. They’re visiting shrines, churches and places of pilgrimage in the United States, exploring the art, architecture, history and Church teaching and tradition behind particular devotions.

They have begun with the Shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal and the National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia in their own city of Philadelphia.

“There are a lot of people who can’t afford to go overseas,” says Diana. “But there are so many treasures here in our own back yard people don’t know about.”

This was one of the reasons the von Glahns launched “The Faithful Traveler.”

Diana has always sought out Catholic churches — wherever the destination — to feel that sense of home. “For Catholics,”



**ON LOCATION.** Filmmakers Diana and David von Glahn bring viewers to shrines like the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., (upper right) and the Katharine Drexel Shrine in Bensalem, Pa. (all others). Courtesy of The Faithful Traveler LLC

she says, “any Catholic church is always their home.”

In fact, one major destination on their honeymoon was the Rue de Bac convent in Paris where St. Catherine Labouré received the Miraculous Medal from the Blessed Mother.

Diana and David see “The Faithful Traveler” as a prime opportunity to evangelize, teach

and inspire. It might even reach non-Catholics and fallen-away Catholics who visit churches and shrines because of the art or architecture.

“There’s something about sacred spaces that entices people; I think it’s certainly the Holy Spirit,” says Diana. “God wants to inspire them to come back. If we get them there

because of the art, architecture, history or tourist aspect, then God will do the rest.”

#### Correcting Misconceptions

The von Glahns also see “The Faithful Traveler” correcting inaccuracies and misconceptions about the Church and sacred places that they find pop-

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ping up in shows on “learning” TV channels, like A&E and Discovery, and in secular travel books, which sometimes cover religious references with touches of irony or skepticism.

In the DVD of their visit to St. Rita’s shrine, they have corrected the misconception that this saint was an abused wife.

“We’re trying to teach Catholics the real-life history of the saints,” says Diana, and “also explore what makes a saint, and why we pray to saints. We present them as models.”

Father Michael De Gregorio, assistant general for the Augustinian Order and former rector of the National Shrine of Saint Rita of Cascia, appreciates the way “The Faithful Traveler” explains the source of misunderstanding.

“[Diana] was very open to presenting the story in a way that was accurate and historically correct, even though it was a story a little bit different than many people are most familiar with,” says Father De Gregorio, who appears on the DVD.

He also finds this travel series “very timely because it makes use of modern technology to reach people and continue to reveal to them the great stories of people who have made a lasting impression through

the witness of their lives.”

**Evangelizing Through Art**

The same goes for teaching the meaning of liturgical and architectural symbols and colors. During their visit to the Miraculous Medal shrine, the von Glahns explain how decorations honor Mary. They answer questions like “Why fleur de lis?” and “What is symbolic of the colors blue, white and gold for Mary in the shrine?”

The videos themselves have been hailed for their exceptional production qualities, even though the project is self-financed. With a degree in TV production, David does the video, lighting, sound and direction and editing. With her legal and marketing background and major in English, Diana writes the scripts and appears on camera.

“What a wonderful example you are of the Second Vatican Council’s call to the laity to bring Christ to the world by means of the arts,” Bishop Michael Sheridan of Colorado Springs, Colo., wrote to the von Glahns.

The producers are also excited about the music, from classics like “Ave Maria” to contemporary songs. The theme

song for the series is “All Access” by Sarah Bauer, which was a highlight of the 2007 Franciscan University of Steubenville High School Youth Conference.

Diana’s Mexican heritage is also an asset; the series is done in Spanish as well as English. The production’s website appears in both English and Spanish.

Vincentian Father Carl Pieber, director of the Miraculous Medal shrine, has nothing but praise for “The Faithful Traveler.”

“It captures everything you want to capture — short of being there,” Father Pieber says. “The Stations of the Cross are every bit as beautiful as she says they are. They look stunning on the video. You want to pray the stations when you see them.”

That holds true for the entire video pilgrimage. “I certainly believe anybody who views it will have the experience of prayer,” he says. “And if they’ve been to the shrine, they’ll have the experiences of reliving it.”

Lizanne Magarity Tando, the director of communications for the shrine’s Central Association of the Miraculous Medal, is also more than pleased. She explains: “David

and Diana have a really great vision and are very thorough in their research and very careful in their script. David has a wonderful eye for the visual, and Diana for the story and telling it. They’re wonderfully devoted to Mary, and it shines through in our video. The priests here are delighted because they hit it on the head.”

What’s up next? The von Glahns are working on a special about the National Shrine of Saint Katharine Drexel in Bensalem, Pa. This year marks the 150th anniversary of St. Katharine’s birth.

And, the von Glahns are hoping their productions will reach a global audience. They have an agreement with a network and hope that by next summer their work will turn into an established series with its own time slot.

*Staff writer Joseph Pronechen writes from Trumbull, Connecticut.*

**INFORMATION**

“The Faithful Traveler” DVDs are available at *TheFaithfulTraveler.com*, or by calling (610) 537-3535. The DVDs will soon be available at Catholic bookstores.