

Statue by former resident artist Ben Victor dedicated at Aberdeen church

Kelda J.L. Pharris kpharris@aberdeennews.com

PUBLICATION: Aberdeen American News (SD)

SECTION: Local

DATE: June 1, 2015

Two years of work culminated in a dedication ceremony at Sacred Heart on Sunday.

This past Thursday, sculptor and **former** Aberdeen **resident** Benjamin Victor installed the statue titled "Our Lady of Sorrows" on Sacred Heart Catholic Church's grounds. A dedication ceremony was held 3 p.m. Sunday at the church. Approximately 200 people attended the ceremony in the Mother's Garden between the church and the rectory. "He looked very nervous until it was installed, and then he was all smiles," Victor said of Father Shane Stevens, who was in attendance at the installation. "It went perfectly, and it was nerve-wracking enough that I had a huge sigh of relief."

The sculpture depicts Mary in prayer with a sword piercing her heart as tears fall from her closed eyes.

"My most moving moment was when my mom visited and saw the statue and was immediately in tears. It was gratifying to see that emotional response from my own mother," Victor said. "It's the tugging of the heartstrings of the viewer that go along with the heart and sadness of the piece."

Clark Thares and his son, Grant, had the honors of removing the purple cloth from the statue and unveiling it to the crowd on Sunday. Thares was a major facilitator of the anonymous donation that paid for the sculpture. No funds came from the church, Father Stevens said.

Two years ago, Victor started on the design work in collaboration with the church, Father Stevens said. Victor then worked through some small-scale clay models. Then he did a full-size clay sculpture.

The next task was procuring a block of Carrera white marble large enough and of high enough quality for the project. The block was obtained from the same quarries where Michelangelo procured marble for his masterworks of the Renaissance, according to a news release on the dedication.

"Because of the size of it, customs takes longer — they weren't hard to work with," Victor said. "Everything just takes a little longer and the care and handling takes a little longer, but it's worth it when you see it."

This is Victor's first full-size marble piece, though he has done smaller marble work. He did a marble bust of **former** Northern State University men's basketball coach Don Meyer that was dedicated in 2010.

Victor outsourced the first stage of rough cutting. He initially tried Dakota Granite, but they didn't have equipment that could hand the 13,000-pound stone. He ended up shipping it to a Canadian company that carved off the largest pieces of the stone. After the rough carving, Victor drove the bust down to his studio in Idaho on the Boise State University campus.

Next, he began work with electric tools using carbide and diamond tips and then went to hand tools for the finishing work. In total, 10,000 pounds of marble were removed from the block. The larger leftover pieces will be used in future projects, Victor said. The final statue is 7 feet tall with a 18-inch base.

"I used traditional hand tools that have been used for at least 1,000 years. I purchased them all from Italy when I worked on the Meyer bust," Victor said. "My hands were so sore **by** the end of it that I could hardly close them at all. You're hoping to not make a single mistake ... to be that focused for that long was really quite an undertaking."

Madeline Fluharty, Victor's assistant and a student apprentice, also helped with the piece.

"Having this work carved in marble **by** NSU graduate (and) sculptor Benjamin Victor makes this work all the more meaningful," Stevens said in the release. "The sculpture will build upon the legacy of the church's belief that the arts are a powerful way to speak of the glory of God."

Victor, who resides in Boise, Idaho, maintains a gallery in the basement of Lincoln Hall on the Northern State University campus, said Jen Deutsch, South Dakota gallery manager and director of marketing for Victor.

Follow @Kelda_aan on Twitter.