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denver & the west

Church's new crucifix to hold revered relic

By [Annette Espinoza](#)
Denver Post Staff Writer

Foxfield

Marge Doyle kept her eyes focused on the 8-foot crucifix as it was hoisted Wednesday above the altar at Our Lady of Loreto Catholic Church.

For now, it is only a crucifix - spectacular and hand-painted - but only a crucifix.

But come Sunday, it will be blessed and become home to a precious sliver of wood, a sacred relic that the Roman Catholic Church teaches comes from the cross upon which Jesus Christ was crucified.

"It's beautiful, and it has found a wonderful home here at Loreto," Doyle, a parishioner at the southeast metro-area church, said of the crucifix.

For 800 years, that piece of the ancient cross has stayed with one family as it moved from Italy to America and finally to Colorado.

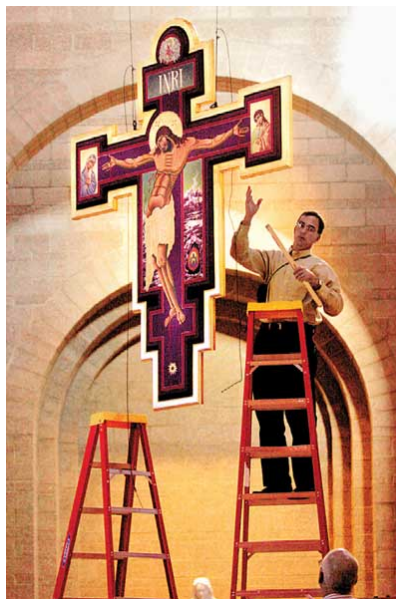
While the family wishes to remain anonymous, it traces its heritage to the Guadagnis, a prominent family in Florence, Italy. The Vatican gave the relic to the family for its help in financing the Fourth Crusade, according to Monsignor Edward Buelt of Our Lady of Loreto.

Is it really the true cross on which Christ was crucified?

That, to some degree, is a matter of faith.

"The most important thing is to look at the fruits of what it produces," said Thomas Serafin, president of the International Crusade for Holy Relics. "If it generates more faith, then that's good."

Relics have been a key symbol for Catholics since the church's earliest days and are still treasured by Catholics who find they connect modern-day teachings with often ordinary people from the past.



Tim Williams of Fransen Pittman General Contractors stands on a ladder Wednesday to check whether a hanging crucifix is level after its installation at Our Lady of Loreto Catholic Church. The hand-painted cross will hold a sliver of wood that is said to have come from the cross on which Christ was crucified. (Post / Cyrus McCrimmon)

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Before a relic can be displayed in public, it must have official documents from the church certifying it does indeed have a connection to a saint or, in this case, Jesus Christ.

Experts have looked into relics of the True Cross for 1,700 years, and scientific evidence backs it up, said Andrew Walther, vice president of Apostolate for Holy Relics, an organization that studies relics.

The cross that Jesus was crucified on was taken

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to Rome by St. Helen, he said. Today, the largest piece of it can be found in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Rome.

"There is absolutely no reason to believe that the relic is not authentic," Walther said.

A sugar-pine frame gilded in 22-karat gold leaf encases the relic.

The hand-painted cross, which will be suspended 86 feet from the central dome of the church, weighs about 150 pounds. It was hand-painted by Father William McNichols of Taos, N.M., the son of former Colorado Gov. Stephen McNichols.

At the top of the crucifix is a pelican, a symbol of the Eucharist. Painted on each arm of the cross are drawings of the Virgin Mary and the disciple John.

Christ is centered against a background that depicts a Colorado mountain scene, and the relic will be centered in a "sunburst" that has been painted on the vertical beam below Christ's bleeding feet.

The relic will be blessed during two Masses at 9 and 11 a.m. Sunday at the church, 18000 E. Arapahoe Road.

It has been almost a year since the church commissioned the crucifix. Wednesday, Buelt finally saw the finished product.

"It brought tears to my eyes," he said. "It will draw people to Jesus. It will draw people to Christ."

Staff writer Annette Espinoza can be reached at 303-820-1655 or aespinoza@denverpost.com.

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"There is absolutely no reason to believe that the relic is not authentic." - Andrew Walther, vice president of Apostolate for Holy Relics (Post / Cyrus McCrimmon)

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