



KEN HIVELEY / Los Angeles Times

Dan Giles displays gates that were part of a shrine at St. Vibiana's Cathedral. The archdiocese asked him to haul them away.

# Discarded Cathedral Gates Provoke Secular Dilemma

**■ History:** After much reflection, welder who hauled the wrought iron artifacts from St. Vibiana's offers them for \$50,000.

By GREG KRICKORIAN  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Dan Giles does not call himself a religious man. But he has, he says, respect for God, those who worship, and monuments inspired by faith.

All of which leads the 60-year-old welder from Silver Lake to a quandary when he considers the stack of wrought iron gates resting in his yard: He got them as scrap and now figures they'll fetch \$50,000.

For decades, the eight gold-painted gates, each weighing several hundred pounds, adorned the shrine to the Virgin of Guadalupe at St. Vibiana's Cathedral in downtown Los Angeles.

But four years ago, about the time earthquake damage threatened St. Vibiana's with a wrecking ball, Giles helped dismantle the shrine and placed the gates

nearby. Then, two years ago, he was again working at the crippled cathedral when a foreman told him to get rid of the gates.

"He asked me how much I wanted to haul them away," Giles recalled Tuesday. "I just swallowed and said I'd take them for free."

Now, Giles has the gates for sale on the Internet—\$50,000 for the lot.

"I have a great respect for the church," he said, "but at the same time, what are they doing throwing these things out?"

Then again, Giles acknowledged his own dilemma. He's the one trying to unload them now.

At the archdiocese, spokesman Tod Tamberg confirmed Tuesday that the gates were part of a shrine at St. Vibiana's that was disassembled when church officials concluded that they could not continue using the cathedral. After being placed outside the cathedral, Tamberg said, the gates were removed when an order was given to clean up St. Vibiana's exterior.

"It was a mistake," Tamberg said. "It wasn't just set aside with Please see SCRAP, B7

# SCRAP: Man Offers to Sell Gates Online

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disdain.

"You have to put things someplace and this is where they were placed, unfortunately," Tamberg said. "And I don't think there is much we can do about it now."

St. Vibiana's, a Spanish Baroque-style structure just two blocks south of City Hall, was built in 1876 and served as the serene Roman Catholic cathedral of Los Angeles until the Northridge earthquake of 1994. Two years later, declared unsafe without significant repairs, it was shuttered and plans were launched for the archdiocese's new cathedral—the \$163-million Our Lady of the Angels.

Enter Giles, a onetime social worker from Toledo.

Though he had performed various jobs at St. Vibiana's for almost a decade, Giles said, it was in 1997 that he was called to help with the dismantling of the cathedral's interior.

"I was the repairman for stuff that fell between licensed contractors and basic on-site maintenance people," he said. "If they had a busted faucet or a broken tile or needed some simple security . . . for 10 years, I was the person they called."

When the dismantling project was underway, Giles said, he personally supervised a crew that removed all the cathedral's pews. Many of them were taken to a Korean church, Giles said, while the rest were put into temporary storage in the basement of the Los Angeles Times building.

"About the same time, I was told to dismantle the shrine and to just take all of the steel . . . and stack it," Giles said. "And that is where [it] sat for a couple of years."

# Officials Ask Welder to Return Historic Church Gates

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2001

By GREG KRICKORIAN  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Almost two years ago, welder Dan Giles rescued eight gold-painted gates to a shrine at St. Vibiana's Cathedral from a scrap heap.

On Wednesday, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Los Angeles Conservancy and an attorney with a powerful Los Angeles law firm said they want the gates returned.

"We are going to ask for the gates," said archdiocese spokesman Tod Tamberg.

The request followed a Times story Wednesday that recounted how Giles was given the ornate gates by a construction supervisor for the archdiocese while working at St. Vibiana's.

After storing the gates in his

yard since May 1999, Giles said, he recently decided to auction them on the Internet, and that's when the controversy began.

Early Wednesday, attorney William Delvac said, he was contacted by one of the top officials of the archdiocese, Msgr. Terance Fleming, and asked to call Giles about the gates.

"I think the starting position [for negotiations] is that the gates were moved in error," said Delvac, whose clients include the conservancy.

"Mistakes happen. People are human," said Delvac, a lawyer with Latham & Watkins who has also represented the archdiocese.

Officials were so serious about recovering the gates that Delvac contacted the Internet auction company to have the items removed from the Web site. Giles agreed late Wednesday to take the

gates off the auction block.

Giles said he was uncertain whether he will simply hand over the gates.

"What am I going to do? I don't know," the 60-year-old Silver Lake resident said.

Although he agreed to remove the gates from the auction and meet with Delvac, Giles said, he was troubled by what he considered threats of legal action if he did not haul the items back to St. Vibiana's.

Delvac "said it was inappropriate that I have the items," Giles said. "But I don't think so. I think it was inappropriate the way the church handled them, just tossing them aside."

Delvac said he simply told Giles he wanted to make sure "nothing bad happens" to the gates, and said it was unclear what would be done with them.

According to a receipt dated May 1999, Giles' work assignment at St. Vibiana's included the following: "Restack woodpile. Clean area. Remove scrap metal and reusable gates."

In the margin was this entry: "No charge."

Several months after bringing he gates home, Giles said, he was offered \$3,000 for one of them by a neighbor's friend. But he refused to break up the set.

Then, a month ago, Giles said he decided to put the gates up for auction on the Internet after hearing about developer Tom Gilmore's plans to turn St. Vibiana's into a boutique hotel, restaurant and academy for the arts.

If those plans are not inspiring an outcry, Giles said, neither should his. "So," he said "my soul is resting a little bit lighter."

Still, Giles said, he is torn about how such a shrine could be dismantled, let alone given away for scrap.

"The shrine was magnificent and the gates are of Buckingham Palace quality," Giles said. "My God, they are beautiful."

Said Giles: "I can just imagine a priest saying 100 years ago we want to build a shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe and his people contribute . . . quarters and nickels and dimes.

"And then, years later . . . they just throw the things out."

Times librarian John Tyrrell contributed to this story.

# Accord Nears on Returning Salvaged Gates of Cathedral

■ **Preservation:** The welder who has them says they can go back to St. Vibiana's site only if they serve as a monument to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

By GREG KRIKORIAN  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The owner of eight wrought iron gates discarded two years ago from St. Vibiana's Cathedral moved closer Monday to returning them, but on one condition: They must be used for a new tribute to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Although the cathedral has been sold to a private developer and is scheduled to become a performing arts center and hotel, welder Dan Giles said Monday that he would sell back the gates only if they are used for their original function, part of a monument to the Virgin.

"They can't have them unless there is at least a painting of the Lady of Guadalupe there," said Giles, 60, of Silver Lake. "Otherwise, no deal."

Already, Giles said, he has turned down one offer for the gates from a foreign investor.

"We never talked money but he didn't quibble about the price," said Giles, who had the gates up for auction for \$50,000 on the Internet.

Giles said he rejected the potential buyer when he learned that the man planned to use them to protect his collection of classic cars.

"I told him I can't do that, and he asked me, 'Why not?'" Giles said. "I said, 'Because for eight decades people have been praying before these gates. And for them to end up as garage doors? I just can't do that.'"

Giles took possession of the gates, each weighing several hundred pounds, in May 1999 while working at the earthquake-damaged St. Vibiana's. A supervisor for the work instructed Giles to haul Guadalupe away the gates and he has kept them in his yard ever since. *Otherwise, no deal.*

After his plans were disclosed in The Times last week, Giles was contacted by attorney Bill Delvac about returning the gates. Delvac represents the Los Angeles Conservancy and also has a long-standing relationship with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

Although the archdiocese and the conservancy support efforts to retrieve the gates, Delvac said, he is in charge of negotiations on behalf of a soon-to-be-formed nonprofit foundation that will oversee the performing arts center.

Delvac declined to discuss details of his discussion with Giles. He expressed optimism that they will reach an agreement.

After a meeting Saturday, Giles said, the two had reached a general agreement that he would receive \$5,000 and Delvac's help in getting building permits for his sister, who Giles said has spent three years trying to rebuild an apartment garage destroyed in an arson fire.

Now, the sticking point seems to be Giles' demand that when the gates are returned, they include some new tribute to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

## Archivist Questions Historical Value

"If they get them back, there would have to be a picture, a plaque, of the Virgin," Giles said.

How much the gates may be worth and when they were built remains unclear.

While many have assumed the gates were installed when the 1876 cathedral was expanded in 1922, archdiocese archivist Msgr. Francis J. Weber said he believed they might have been installed as recently as 1971.

"They may be valuable for the iron in them," he said, "but they are not historically valuable."

Sculptor Robert Graham, who designed the doors for the new cathedral, declined to weigh in on the fate or potential value of the gates.

"To my mind, he has already done the right thing by salvaging them," Graham said of Giles. "What happens to them now is up to him."

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