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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 KRIKORIAN  
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."

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 the 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.

## Officials Ask Welder to Return Historic Church Gates

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2001

By GREG KRIKORIAN  
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

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 re-

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 he 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

"The plan for the former cathedral is to reuse it as a performing arts venue and the plan for the rehabilitation is in its . . . formative stages," Delvac said.

Linda Dishman, executive director of the conservancy, said it was likely that the gates would be returned to St. Vibiana's interior.

Neither she nor Delvac, however, said a decision has been reached about financially compensating Giles for the gates.

And that could prolong the dispute.

"I'm not broke, but I do work for room and board," said Giles. "I told the attorney, 'You have tens of millions of dollars floating around in the church. You are building a new cathedral.' And at the same time, they are asking me to make a senti-