

Durant monument slated at Liberty Park for slain Catholic sisters

By Matthew Breazeale

The brutal slayings of two Catholic sisters who lived in Durant and worked in Lexington and beyond, are still felt through the local communities they served.

August 25 will mark one year since the two sisters were found stabbed in their home on Castalian Springs Road and the arrest of Rodney Earl Sanders.

A grassroots effort to memorialize the two servants of Christ is developing with the hopes of erecting a monument at Liberty Park in Durant.

Carolyn Riley, who is part of the efforts, said she is carrying on from a conversation she had with another friend who is now deceased.

"After the incident that happened, you know Mrs. Jonell was talking and I was telling her that I didn't realize that the nuns were so well loved in Holmes County," said Riley. "A lot of people I saw at the scene (the day the two sisters were found murdered), they were so emotional about it, seeing how the people in Holmes County, especially in Durant, how much they loved the sisters because of their dedication. They were so dedicated to the community."

Riley's friend Jonell Payton passed away in November. Payton was serving as alderman for Durant in Ward 1 at the time, whom Riley replaced in a special election.

"I began to tell Mrs. Jonell," said Riley, "We don't need to let this pass us up, for noble ladies like these. We don't need to forget them, I think there should be something to remember and honor their work."

"So we went to the (Durant Board of Aldermen) and the board OK'd that we could do this monument," Riley continued, "put the monument in Liberty Park in their honor. We wanted to check with the diocese, the church, and make sure it was OK with them. I talked to Father Greg (Plata) in Lexington. He began to tell me he thought it was a great idea that they would be honored. We wanted him to get up with (the sisters') families and see when they could be available for a memorial service and how they would want it. We wanted their input, because we didn't want to do anything against their wishes or offend them."

"My plans were, and the City



Pictured above is a rendering of what the proposed monument could look like memorializing the two sisters. Plans are under way to erect the monument at Liberty Park in Durant.

(Courtesy Photo)

of Durant's, was to ask the different churches, businesses, to offer a donation so we can pay for this monument in honor of them," Riley said. "Any of the money left over, I would love for it to go in to a scholarship in their honor also. I think, if I'm not mistaken, that there is one set up by the families, so if we have any funds left over it can go to them."

Riley explained that donations would be accepted through the City of Durant through a separate fund.

"Like I was telling Father Greg, I really didn't know how to go about doing this. I didn't want to accept any money, me personally. I asked the mayor (Tasha Davis), she said it could be sent to the City of Durant and the city would be over it, in a separate account" with the left over funds put towards a scholarship.

The exact location within Lib-

erty Park has not been selected yet, according to Riley, but she thinks it would on the opposite side of the park gazebo from the current 9/11 Memorial.

"I hoping after next week we'll have everything settled," said Riley.

A memorial service is set for Saturday, May 20 at 3 p.m. in Liberty Park in Durant. The park is located at Northeast Depot Street and MS Highway 12.

A time of prayer and reflection will be held followed by a light reception.

Riley added that she also has future plans to erect a monument for deceased Durant ward two alderman Jonell Payton whose seat on the board she replaced. Payton died at a Jackson hospital in November 2016 after sustaining a head injury at the Holmes County Courthouse.

For more information about the event contact Riley at carolynriley56@yahoo.com.

Staying on the right track

By Gary Andrews

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Living in a town where trains pass through each day, I am going to be caught at a crossing sitting and waiting for all of these cars to go by. This is nothing unusual and for all of us that have done this just wish the train would hurry up and get out of the way.

Recently I started noticing, or paying attention to, the cars the big engines were pulling. Many are nice and clean, some are rusty or dirty, and some have graffiti written all over them. This reminds me of going through life. Some of us have our baggage that we carry, some of us have lived a pretty clean and uneventful life, and some of us are really marred with things that have happened to us and we just need a good cleaning or soul searching to get ourselves on the right track. Just as the train headed up the tracks the cars can't comprehend what they are doing and haven't a clue where they

are headed. Does your life seem this way on occasions? It is up to us to find the direction that we want our lives to go in. I remember reading a statement from Ken Keyes that said, "A loving person lives in a loving world. A hostile person lives in a hostile world. Everyone you meet is your mirror." Attitude plays a big role in the way our lives are going. Some of us may seem to be on the tracks of life and not have an inkling of what we are doing or the direction we are going in. Many of us have jumped into quick fixes or feel good regimes, yet can't seem to find satisfaction within our own life. The writer of Ecclesiastes in chapter 2:24 -26 tells us, "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God for with him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing

up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Self-examination of what we are doing with our lives is in order. We should all understand that if we are a child of God then we are going to prosper and be taken care of when this meaningless life is over, for only He can give us eternal life. Don't be like the train on the tracks with cars following a engine with no idea where they are going to end up.

Prayer: Thank you for loving me as I am. I pray that whatever I do will be pleasing to you and that my life will be a good witness to others. Amen.

Suggested daily Bible readings: Sunday - Romans 14:1-8; Monday - Psalm 51:10-12; Tuesday - Ruth 1:8-22; Wednesday - Deuteronomy 20:5-9; Thursday - Matthew 19:14; Friday - Genesis 13:8-9; Saturday - 1 Corinthians 16:15-18.

Gary Andrews is the author of *Encouraging Words: 30-days in God's Word*. To obtain a copy go to his website www.gadevotionals.com.

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To begin, join me in our Scripture Memory Challenge. It's an adventure to hide God's Word deep in our hearts. This week let's memorize Joshua 1:9, God's promise of power. "Have I not commanded you be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid. Do not be discour-

aged for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go!"

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