

Champion 1859

An Approved Apparition and Its Documentary Record

A source-audited apparition study

What the earliest published witnesses say, what the 1871 fire record will and will not carry, what the bishop judged in 2010, and what that judgment obliges

Contents

1	The Act Under Study	1
2	What the Record Does Not Contain	2
2.1	The seer left no writing	2
2.2	The bishop's own account of the record	3
2.3	What this study looked for and did not find	3
2.4	Why the gap is not an argument	3
2.5	The consequence is the documented part	4
3	The Earliest Published Witness: Eliza Allen Starr	4
3.1	Where the account sits	4
3.2	The passage	5
3.3	What this witness does and does not carry	5
4	The Second Published Witness: Peter Pernin	6
4.1	Where the account sits	6
4.2	The passage	7
4.3	What this witness does and does not carry	7
5	Collation: Three Narratives and One Message	8
5.1	The current custodial narrative	8
5.2	The three narratives side by side	9
5.3	The stratigraphy of the reported words	9
5.4	The calendar of the cult, and where the anniversary moved	11
5.5	What none of this touches	12
6	The Night of 8 October 1871	12
6.1	What burned, and where	12
6.2	What Pernin reports	12
6.3	A quotation that is not Pernin's	13
6.4	What the 2010 decree says about the fire	14
6.5	A pastoral note that belongs beside the claim	15
7	The Inquiry and the Decree of 8 December 2010	15
7.1	The inquiry as the decree describes it	15
7.2	The decree read against the norms then in force	15
7.3	The negative criteria, and what the decree does not say	16
7.4	What the decree quotes, and what it passes over	17
7.5	Was Rome involved?	17
7.6	An anachronism in the recitals	17
7.7	What the decree obliges, and what it does not	18
8	After 2010: Shrine, Title, Solemnity, Cause, and the 2024 Norms	18
8.1	Shrine status is a separate legal category	18
8.2	The change of title, and the annual solemnity	19
8.3	The cause of Adele Brise	19
8.4	What the 2024 Norms did, and did not do, to a 2010 act	19
8.5	The acts, with the witness used for each	20
9	Project Synthesis: The Judgment of This Study	21
9.1	The judgment	21
9.2	The counterargument at its strongest	21
9.3	What would change the judgment	22
9.4	Reading the message within the faith	22
9.5	What is left, and it is not small	23
10	Notes	23
A	Scope, Status, and Qualifications	27
B	References	29

1 The Act Under Study

On 8 December 2010, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, David Laurin Ricken, twelfth Bishop of Green Bay, signed a four-page decree in the chapel at Champion, Wisconsin. Its title states its object precisely: *Decree on the Authenticity of the Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help*. Everything this study says about what the Catholic Church has and has not settled at Champion hangs on reading the last page of that decree exactly.

Operative text — Decree of David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, 8 December 2010, operative clause, read in the four-page signed PDF published by the National Shrine

It remains to me now, the Twelfth Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay and the lowliest of the servants of Mary, to declare with moral certainty and in accord with the norms of the Church:

that the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859 do exhibit the substance of supernatural character, and I do hereby approve these apparitions as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.

I encourage the faithful to frequent this holy place as a place of solace and answered prayer.

Given at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Champion, Wisconsin, the eighth day of December in the year of Our Lord two thousand and ten, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.¹

Four features of that sentence carry the whole weight of the case, and each of them is easy to lose in summary.

First, the *object*. What is approved is “the events, apparitions and locutions given to Adele Brise in October of 1859.” Not a shrine, not a devotion, not a book, not a fire, not a healing, not a chronology, not a text. The decree fixes a month and a year and a person, and it fixes nothing else about the events themselves — not a day, not a number of appearances, not a sequence, not a wording.

Second, the *predicate*. The events “do exhibit the substance of supernatural character.” That is not the older formula *constat de supernaturalitate*. “The substance of” is a real qualifier, and the decree’s own reasoning, quoted in §2.2 below, shows why the bishop needed it: his experts were working from a documentary record he himself describes as “not abundant.” The claim is that what is substantially there is of supernatural character, not that every transmitted detail is.

Third, the *effect*. The apparitions are approved “as worthy of belief (although not obligatory) by the Christian faithful.” The parenthesis is in the decree. It is the whole doctrine of private revelation compressed into three words: public Revelation is complete in Christ, and no approved apparition can add to it or require the divine and Catholic faith owed to it.²

Fourth, the *author*. This is a diocesan act. It was made by the local ordinary under the procedural regime then in force, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Norms regarding the manner of proceeding in the discernment of presumed apparitions or revelations* of 25 February 1978, whose Part III begins: “Above all, the duty of vigilance and intervention falls to the Ordinary of the place.”³ The decree names no Roman intervention, and §7 explains why its silence on that point settles nothing either way.

This is an evidence-first apparition study. Its governing claim is that Champion is the clearest American instance of a positively judged private revelation whose event stratum has almost no contemporary documentation, and that this is a statement about the record rather than an argument against the judgment. The two earliest published narratives that this study could reach — Eliza Allen Starr’s, copyright-entered in 1871, and Peter Pernin’s, printed at Montreal in 1874 — were both written more than a decade after the events, both by devotional authors raising money, and they disagree with each other and with the current custodial narrative about the season, the distance walked, the order and setting of the encounters, the appearance of the figure, and above all the extent of the reported words. The self-identification as Queen of Heaven, the command of general confession, the warning of punishment, the beatitude on the companions, and the question about the vineyard are absent from both of them. The preservation of the chapel enclosure in the fires of 8 October 1871 is early and well attested by Pernin; the downpour, the refugee crowd, the livestock, and the well are not, and a widely reproduced paragraph about that night circulates under Pernin’s name that he did not write. Bishop Ricken’s decree of 2010 judged, with moral certainty, that the October 1859 events exhibit the substance of supernatural character and approved them as worthy of belief though not obligatory. That judgment deserves exact reception. It does not convert any later sentence into a transcript, does not declare the fire or any cure a miracle — the decree says in terms that none has been so declared — and does not add anything to the Revelation complete in Christ.

The study runs in the order the evidence forces. §2 states what the record does not contain, because at Champion the absence is the governing fact. §3 and §4 read the two earliest published witnesses at length and in their own settings. §5 collates them against each other and against the narrative the shrine publishes today, and sets out the stratigraphy of the reported message. §6 separates the fire of 8 October 1871 into what contemporary record supports and what later devotional narration supplies, and documents a misattributed quotation that has passed into general circulation. §7 reads the 2010 inquiry and decree against the norms then in force and states exactly what the act obliges. §8 follows the later institutional acts — national shrine, change of title, annual solemnity, cause of canonization — and asks what the 2024 norms did to a legacy judgment of this kind. §9 states this study’s own judgment under a visible label, with the strongest counterargument and the finding that would overturn it. Work-wide bounds, taxonomy, and qualifications are in the terminal appendix; witnesses and rights are in the References.

Controlling status at the as-of date of this study (2026-07-25)

Event: Reported apparitions and locutions to Adele Brise, Robinsonville (now Champion), Brown County, Wisconsin, October 1859.

Competent authority: The Bishop of Green Bay. The see was not erected until 1868; the jurisdiction competent in 1859 is not named in this study, which did not verify it.

Controlling act: Decree of Bishop David L. Ricken, 8 December 2010, approving the October 1859 events, apparitions, and locutions as exhibiting the substance of supernatural character and as worthy of belief although not obligatory.

Procedural regime of that act: The CDF Norms of 25 February 1978, replaced in their entirety on 19 May 2024 by the Norms of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith of 17 May 2024 (art. 27 of the latter).

What the act does not establish: Any particular day, count, sequence, or wording of the 1859 events; the authenticity of any narrative detail beyond “the substance”; a miracle, whether of the 1871 preservation or of any reported healing — the decree states that none of the reported favours has been officially declared a miracle; any obligation of belief.

Later acts located: Designation as a national shrine (reported by the shrine as 19 March 2016, by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; the conference’s own act was not reached); a change of title from Our Lady of Good Help to Our Lady of Champion and an annual solemnity on 9 October, first celebrated in 2023, which the shrine attributes to word received from the Holy See’s Dicastery for Divine Worship in 2023 (the underlying instruments were not reached); the opening of a cause of canonization for Adele Brise, who is now styled Servant of God.

Not located: Any act of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, before or after 2010, reclassifying, confirming, restricting, or superseding the 2010 decree.

2 What the Record Does Not Contain

Apparition studies usually begin with the seer’s own deposition. At Champion there is none, and there never was one. That single fact shapes everything that follows, so it is worth stating carefully rather than mentioning in passing.

2.1 The seer left no writing

Adele Brise could not write. The National Shrine says so in its own current presentation of the events, in the paragraph in which it explains how its narrative was constructed: she “never learned to read or write and thus chronicled her experiences with the Blessed Mother verbally.”⁴ She was Walloon-speaking; when Eliza Allen Starr met her in Chicago she could not speak with her directly and had to work through a younger companion who served as interpreter.⁵ Everything ever written about what she said in October 1859 was written by somebody else, in a language she did not use, at some remove in time.

That is a different situation from a poor record. A poor record can improve; a written deposition can be found in an archive. Here there is nothing of that kind to find, because the only first-person witness never produced a document.

2.2 The bishop's own account of the record

The 2010 decree does not conceal this. Under the heading GIVEN ALL OF THE ABOVE, after reporting that “three Marian experts have studied the history of this alleged apparition and all of the extant documents, letters, and written testimonies,” it turns directly to the objection:

Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 3, on the state of the documentation

Objections concerning whether there was enough evidence to support a judgment in favor of the supernatural character of the events were thoroughly investigated and answered by the experts. The documents from the early history of the Shrine are not abundant, due primarily to the fact that Green Bay at the time of the apparition was frontier country. One of the experts affirmed that any lack of information does “not invalidate the overall impression of coherence between event and consequences, personality of the seer and commitment to the mission received, the comparability between this event and similar recognized apparitions, and challenges of the historical context and responses given.”⁶

This is an unusually candid recital, and it should be read as what it is: a competent authority stating on the face of his own act that the documentary base is thin, and resting the judgment not on documents but on *coherence* — between the event and its consequences, between the seer's character and the mission she carried out, and between this case and cases already recognized. That is a real form of argument. It is not a documentary argument, and the decree does not pretend that it is.

2.3 What this study looked for and did not find

The negative results below are bounded and correctable. Each names the exact corpus searched and the method; none of them can exclude material in an archive, a newspaper file, or a language this study did not reach.

- **No 1859–1870 published narrative was located.** The earliest published account this study reached is Starr's, in a volume whose copyright was entered in 1871. Nothing earlier came to hand in any of the searches described in Appendix A.
- **The standard regional compilation of 1881 does not mention the apparitions.** A literal search of the full optical-character-recognition text of the 1881 *History of Northern Wisconsin* for **Brise**, **Brisse**, **Good Help**, and **Bon Secours** returned no hit. **Robinsonville** occurs once in the whole volume, in a Fort Howard businessman's biographical sketch, and refers not to the chapel but to a school there “established under the care of the Winnebago Presbytery.”⁷
- **The nearest contemporary account of the 1871 fires does not record the preservation.** Frank Tilton's *Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin*, published at Green Bay in 1871, lists Robinsonville among “the largest settlements destroyed in this track of fire” and says nothing whatever about a spared enclosure. §6 treats this at length, with the limits of the argument from silence stated there.

Not reached at all, and therefore incapable of supporting any clause in this study: the archives of the Diocese of Green Bay and of the National Shrine; nineteenth-century Green Bay newspaper files; the sacramental registers of the parish Adele walked to; Sister M. Dominica's shrine history of 1955, on which the current custodial narrative partly rests; and the reports of the three Marian experts whose findings the 2010 decree summarizes. Appendix A lists these as standing ceilings, and no sentence in this study depends on any of them.

2.4 Why the gap is not an argument

It would be easy, and wrong, to move from “the event stratum is undocumented” to “the events did not happen.” Three considerations block that move.

The first is that the pattern is exactly what a frontier Walloon settlement in 1859 would produce. There was no resident priest — Pernin says the colony had none at the time and that Adele walked to the neighbouring parish for Mass;⁸ there was no diocese until 1868;⁹ there was no one, in short, whose office it was to take a statement. The absence of a deposition is not evidence of fabrication; it is evidence of a frontier.

The second is that what *is* documented, early and independently, is the consequence rather than the event: a woman walking between Belgian settlements to teach catechism, a school, a chapel on the spot, a fenced enclosure conveyed to the bishop, and processions drawing thousands. Starr and Pernin agree on all of that, from separate encounters and for separate purposes, and it is verifiable in a way the apparition itself is not.

The third is doctrinal rather than historical. Even a fully documented private revelation would not oblige belief, and an undocumented one does not thereby become suspect. The category simply does not work like the deposit of faith. What follows, therefore, is not a trial of Adele Brise. It is an attempt to say, of each element in a widely repeated narrative, how far back it can actually be traced.

2.5 The consequence is the documented part

That second consideration deserves to be set out rather than asserted, because it is the strongest thing the record actually contains and it is the thing the 2010 decree leans on hardest.

By 1870 or 1871, on Starr's testimony, there was a free school with more pupils than its room could hold, run by a woman who charged nothing and who had come as far as Chicago in a black cape-bonnet to beg for a schoolhouse, a chapel, and a house for religious; and there was an annual procession on 15 August commemorating the apparition. By 1874, on Pernin's, there was a schoolhouse holding more than a hundred children prepared yearly for First Communion; a chapel standing on the reported spot with the tree preserved inside it; an enclosure of about six acres, given to Adele and by her conveyed to the Bishop of Green Bay, fenced with boards and ringed by a narrow path; two solemn processions a year drawing more than four thousand pilgrims; and five or six young women sharing the work. Neither writer had seen the other's book. Neither was reporting the apparition as his or her subject. They agree.

The custodial timeline continues the line, and although it is a custodial statement rather than a record this study verified, it is worth having in view: a second chapel in 1861 and the beginning of pilgrimages; a Third Order Franciscan community with a school and convent in 1864; the formal opening of the chapel school as St. Mary's Boarding Academy in 1869; a brick chapel in 1880 and a brick residence and school in 1885; Adele's death in 1896; the entrusting of the work to the Franciscan sisters of Bay Settlement in 1902; and the closing of the boarding school by the bishop in 1929.¹⁰

This is what a reader should hold beside the emptiness of §2.3. The event stratum is undocumented and the institutional stratum is not. That asymmetry is not a defect peculiar to Champion; it is what happens whenever an interior experience produces an institution. And it is exactly the shape of the inference the decree makes when it speaks of "coherence between event and consequences." The inference runs backwards, from a school and a chapel and a fifty-year life of catechesis to something that started them. It is a real inference. It is not, and cannot be made into, a document.

3 The Earliest Published Witness: Eliza Allen Starr

3.1 Where the account sits

The earliest published narrative of the Champion events that this study was able to reach is not a chronicle, a diocesan record, or an apparition book. It is an aside of some four printed pages inside a chapter on Saint Lioba, in a volume of saints' lives written for Catholic girls by Eliza Allen Starr and dedicated "to the faithful youth of the Catholic Church in America."¹¹

That setting matters, and not only as background colour. Starr's point in the chapter is a thesis about vocation: that "our good American girls try to be like Italian and French saints, instead of trying to be, simply, saints of God," and that sanctity takes the shape of the country it is planted in. She then writes: "A charming example of what I wish to make you understand about this occurs to me as I write, and I shall give you the story with its real names." What follows is offered as an illustration of the teaching vocation. The apparition is instrumental to the moral; it is not the subject.¹²

The transmission chain is short but not direct: Adele told the story in Starr's Chicago parlour, in Walloon or French, through a younger companion who interpreted into English, and Starr wrote it up afterwards from memory for a devotional book. Starr is not reporting a deposition. She is reporting a conversation.

3.2 The passage

Because it is the earliest witness located, and because it is out of copyright, it is given here at length rather than paraphrased. The text is Starr's, transcribed from the 1883 Baltimore reissue and collated against the independent Chicago printing of 1896.

Eliza Allen Starr, *Patron Saints*, "St. Lioba," pp. 298–301, in the Baltimore 1883 reissue of the volume copyright-entered in 1871

Twelve years ago, Sister Adele, living in the same neighborhood as now, was in the habit of going to mass every Sunday, though she could do this only by walking eleven miles to the place where mass was celebrated. One summer day as she was returning through the dense woods from mass, she saw a bright, luminous atmosphere in the woods around her, and from this luminous atmosphere there came forth the figure of a most lovely lady, white and shining, her face covered with a veil, her robe falling over her feet, and her hands joined, as one sees the Blessed Virgin represented in pictures of the Immaculate Conception. Our good, humble sister Adele, recognized the Virgin Mother, and full of joy, kept the vision in her heart, telling no one of the heavenly consolation given to her. A few weeks after, as she was on her way to mass, the same lovely apparition made her step light and her heart joyful; and that same afternoon before sunset, as she was returning, the same white and shining figure stood before her. This time, encouraged by its repeated appearance, she spoke in her humble way, to the veiled Vision, saying, "Dear Mistress, what do you wish me to do?" Good Sister Adele did not think that the Blessed Virgin was thus appearing to her, repeatedly, for her spiritual consolation, alone; she knew that something was wanted of her. Our Blessed Lady's reply was, "Gather around you the neglected children in this wild country, running idle about the woods, and teach them what they should know for salvation." "Gladly would I gather them in, dear Mistress," said Sister Adele, "but how shall I teach them, who know so little myself?" "Teach them," said the radiant visitor, "their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the cross, and how to approach the sacraments. This is what I wish you to do;" and the beautiful vision, with its luminous atmosphere, disappeared, and left the dense woods as solemn as before, while dear Sister Adele walked on to her own humble home with her heavenly commission in her heart.

... Every year, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, a religious procession celebrates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Adele; thus keeping in mind the origin of her humble school of instruction for these wandering lambs of the fold of Christ, which has changed this wilderness into a garden of delights to the Saviour of souls. Sister Adele does not yet belong to any religious Order, but if she ever does, I hope she will wear her simple cape-bonnet, as a memorial of the rustic garb in which she met the Queen of angels and of saints, and received her commission to teach the little ones of the 'household of faith.'¹³

The omitted paragraph reports that Adele began at once to gather the children of the log cabins; that she charged no tuition, "no 'price,' for teaching, no tuition bills to make out to her pupils, even at the end of a whole year," so that the parents "finding the school a free school, were glad to send their children"; that the room was soon too small; and that she therefore "undertook to beg, from more favored communities, the money necessary for building a large school-house, then a chapel, and, finally, to raise a home for the religious, whom she hoped to persuade to assist her in her great work." Starr adds that "it was on this errand that she had come to our city."¹⁴

3.3 What this witness does and does not carry

Read as evidence rather than as devotion, the passage yields a surprisingly definite set of results.

The date. "Twelve years ago," reckoned from a text whose copyright was entered in 1871 and which refers to the interview as having taken place "this last summer," lands on 1859 or 1858. This matters more than it looks. Starr had no October and no ninth of the month to be faithful to; she was doing rough arithmetic in a book about saints. That her arithmetic falls on the year the diocese would fix a century and a half later is a genuine, if loose, independent corroboration of the year — and it is silent about the month.

The setting. Three encounters, all on the Sunday road to and from Mass: the first while returning, one summer day; the second "a few weeks after," while going; the third the same afternoon before sunset, while returning. There is no errand to a grist mill, no fixed day of the week for the first, no priest consulted between the second and the third.

The figure. "A bright, luminous atmosphere"; a lady "white and shining"; the face *covered with a veil*; the robe falling over the feet; the hands joined, "as one sees the Blessed Virgin represented in pictures of the Immaculate

Conception.” There is no crown of stars, no yellow sash, no long golden hair, no light so overwhelming that the seer cannot look at the face. Starr’s figure is veiled; the received figure is unveiled and described in detail.

The identification. Starr is explicit about how the identity was reached: “Our good, humble sister Adele, recognized the Virgin Mother.” The recognition is the seer’s, made from the iconography she knew. The figure does not announce herself. Nothing in this witness corresponds to “I am the Queen of Heaven.”

The words. The whole reported dialogue is four sentences: the seer’s “Dear Mistress, what do you wish me to do?”; the commission to gather the neglected children and teach them what they should know for salvation; the seer’s objection that she knows too little herself; and the answer naming catechism, the sign of the cross, and approach to the sacraments. There is no command of general confession, no offering of Communion for the conversion of sinners, no warning that the Son will be obliged to punish, no beatitude addressed to companions who cannot see, no question about idleness while others work in the vineyard, no “Go and fear nothing, I will help you.”

The cult. “Every year, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, a religious procession celebrates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Adele.” This is the earliest attestation of the Champion cult that this study located, and it attaches the commemoration of the apparition to 15 August, not to 9 October.

Project synthesis — the evidentiary weight of a devotional aside

This study judges Starr’s account to be the single most valuable piece of Champion evidence located, and judges its value to arise precisely from its lack of interest in the apparition. Starr was writing to recommend a vocation, in a genre that rewards wonder, for readers who would have welcomed it, about a woman she found impressive; if any witness had an incentive to enlarge, she did. What she reports instead is a veiled figure, a recognition made by the seer rather than an announcement made by the visitor, and a commission about catechism. A narrative element absent from a witness with every motive to include it is weaker, thereafter, than one she happens to omit. That is the ground on which §5 assigns the fuller message to a later stratum. The counter-consideration, which is real, is that Starr was working through an interpreter in a single conversation and was compressing hard for a children’s book, so her silence may record her own editing rather than Adele’s telling; §5 accordingly treats her silences as evidence about the tradition’s early published form rather than as evidence about what Adele said in 1859.

4 The Second Published Witness: Peter Pernin

4.1 Where the account sits

The second witness is better known and worse understood. Peter Pernin was the missionary priest at Peshtigo and Marinette who lived through the firestorm of the night of 8 October 1871 by standing in the Peshtigo River, and whose memoir of it remains the classic eyewitness account of that catastrophe. He published it at Montreal in 1874, in French and in English in the same year, and the Champion material is not part of the memoir at all: it is an appendix, added after the narrative ends.¹⁵

Two features of that provenance bear on the appendix’s evidential value, and they pull in opposite directions. The book was a fundraiser, sold for the benefit of a church at Marinette dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes, and its governing theme is the finger of God and the intervention of the Blessed Virgin; the appendix exists to supply a second instance of that theme. But Pernin also names his own restraint: “I must necessarily abridge details and be guarded in my words so as to avoid wounding the modesty of the personages mentioned in this recital, many of whom are still living and may later read these pages.” A witness who tells you he is compressing has told you how to read his silences.

He also had access. He was a priest working across Green Bay from the Belgian settlement; he had spoken with people who knew Adele as a child in Belgium; and he invites his readers to go and question her themselves, “this humble place of pilgrimage, as yet in its infancy, and the only one, I believe, of the nature in the United States.”¹⁶

4.2 The passage

Peter Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, Appendix, printed pp. 95–97 (Montreal, 1874), with the French of the same year collated at every clause

Among them dwells an unmarried female of about forty years of age, poor in point of fortune and physical attractions but rich in grace and virtue. Her name is Adèle Brisse. . . . Ten or twelve years ago, the colony possessed no resident priest, and this fervent Catholic set out early every Sunday morning on foot, and walked to the neighboring parish, seven miles and a-half distant, approached the sacraments, heard Mass and returned in all haste to resume her duties in her humble home.

She was returning one morning, after having approached the Blessed Eucharist. All at once she perceived above the middle of the little path she was following through the woods, a Lady of great beauty and majestic mien, who stood as if suspended between two trees, bordering the path. Surprised and greatly moved, though not terrified, she fell on her knees, uttered a short prayer, then rose to her feet again. She made no mention to her companions of what she had seen, but they had witnessed her emotion, divined the cause, and the mysterious manifestation began to be talked about. The week following, Adèle Brisse walked as usual to the neighboring parish to fulfil her religious duties, returning from mass accompanied by a number of her companions when the same apparition appeared to her at the same place. . . . Still many resolved they would accompany her on her next journey and judge for themselves, which they accordingly did the following Sunday. After having confessed, communicated and heard mass, Adèle Brisse took her homeward way, accompanied this time by a numerous escort, among whom were several men. . . . Arrived at the place where the Lady had already appeared twice, she showed herself, for the third time, more majestic and loveable than ever. The girl fell on her knees, no feeling of fear agitating her breast, but instead, a sentiment of perfect confidence, and then there ensued between herself and this majestic Lady, a long conversation of which I will repeat only what is necessary to the elucidation of my subject. Adèle began:

“My good mother, what do you want of me?”

“That you should instruct my children,” was the Lady’s reply. “You have just received my Son within your breast, and you have done well, but these poor children receive Him without knowing what they do, and are growing up in ignorance of their religion. I wish you to instruct and above all prepare them for their first communion.”

“How can I do that, my good mother, I am but a poor ignorant creature myself?”

“Go, and fear nothing; I will help you.”¹⁷

Pernin then gives the sequel that Starr also gives, and gives it more fully: Adele going from village to village through rain, snow and heat; neither fatigue nor ridicule stopping her; a priest at last found for the colony, who advises her to raise money for a schoolhouse rather than wear herself out following the children through the woods; and, by 1874, a school “capable of containing more than one hundred children who yearly are prepared therein for their first communion” and “a little chapel built in the place where the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and in which is kept as a precious relic, the tree sanctified by her apparent touch.” The two wooden buildings stand in an enclosure of “about six acres of land, a gift bestowed on her, which she in turn made over to the Bishop of Green Bay,” fenced with boards, with a narrow path winding round it along which a solemn procession passes twice a year “at fixed epochs” — a “procession which attracts more than four thousand pilgrims to the neighborhood.” Five or six young women had by then joined her.¹⁸

4.3 What this witness does and does not carry

The date is a problem, and it is Pernin’s own. “Ten or twelve years ago” from an 1874 imprint gives 1862–1864, and the French is no vaguer: *Il y a 10 ou 12 ans*. Pernin attaches the phrase to the colony’s want of a resident priest and then narrates the apparitions as following, so his implied date for the events is three to five years later than the October 1859 that the diocese later fixed. This study does not attempt to reconcile the two. It records that the second earliest published witness, writing fifteen years after the received date and with local access, placed the events in the early 1860s, and that no act of any competent authority has ever adjudicated the point.

The sequence differs from Starr’s. Pernin has three encounters, all on the return from Mass, on three successive Sundays, with the crowd growing each week. Starr has the first on a return, the second on an outward journey some weeks later, and the third the same afternoon. They cannot both be right, and neither of them is the sequence the shrine narrates today.

The distance differs from Starr's. Pernin's French gives two and a half leagues, which his English translates as seven and a half miles; Starr has eleven. Nothing turns on the discrepancy except the reminder that neither witness was working from a record.

The figure is barely described. "A Lady of great beauty and majestic mien, who stood as if suspended between two trees, bordering the path." The two trees are here, in the earliest witness that mentions them; their species is not. There is no veil, no crown, no sash, no hair, no light.

The identification is again the seer's, not the visitor's. Adele addresses her as "my good mother" from the first exchange. There is no self-naming.

The words are Eucharistic and catechetical, and one received clause appears. Pernin's version of the commission turns on First Communion and on children receiving the Lord "without knowing what they do," which is not in Starr; and it closes with "Go, and fear nothing; I will help you," which *is* the closing clause of the message as the shrine and the 2010 decree now give it. That is the one element of the fuller received wording that this study can trace to a witness of the 1870s.

The silence is declared. Pernin says he will repeat "only what is necessary to the elucidation of my subject." His omissions therefore prove much less than Starr's. If a self-identification as Queen of Heaven, a command of general confession, and a warning of punishment were current at Robinsonville in 1874, Pernin had a stated reason to pass over them — though it is worth noticing that a warning of punishment would have suited the theology of his own book, which reads the Peshtigo fire as a summons to repentance and calls the town "a modern Sodom in the sense that it can serve as an example to all."¹⁹

Project synthesis — what Pernin's declared abridgement is worth

This study judges that Pernin's appendix establishes four things securely and one thing not at all. Securely: that by 1874 the site had a chapel on the reported spot with the tree preserved in it, a school, a six-acre enclosure conveyed to the Bishop of Green Bay, two annual processions drawing thousands, and a small community of women; that the reported commission was already understood as catechesis directed to First Communion; that "Go, and fear nothing; I will help you" was already part of the received wording; and that the events were, in 1874, unjudged by ecclesiastical authority, which Pernin says in terms. Not at all: the date. Pernin's own "ten or twelve years" is incompatible with October 1859, and this study can find no way to resolve the conflict from the sources it reached. The strongest reply is that Pernin was writing from conversation, not calculation, and that a priest recalling a lay woman's biography fifteen years on may casually shave a few years; that reply is plausible, and it is also unverifiable, which is why the conflict is recorded here rather than smoothed away.

5 Collation: Three Narratives and One Message

5.1 The current custodial narrative

The narrative a pilgrim meets today is fuller than either nineteenth-century witness, and the National Shrine says plainly where it comes from. Its closing paragraph is worth quoting, because it is more careful than most retellings of it:

National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, "Our Story," closing note, read 2026-07-25

Adele Brice, the visionary who witnessed Our Lady in Champion, never learned to read or write and thus chronicled her experiences with the Blessed Mother verbally. Because of this, the above apparition account was developed based on a compilation of oral history from Adele and sources close to her, historical documents, and second and third-hand accounts found in the archives of the Shrine. While some details vary, the account strives to do its best in determining the most common and consistent information across the various historical materials.²⁰

On that account, the first encounter is silent and happens while Adele is walking a trail in the woods, her family later supposing she had seen a soul in purgatory; the second, "on what is believed to be Sunday, October 9, 1859," occurs on the way to Mass with her sister and a friend, at the same spot between two trees "believed to be a maple and hemlock"; the parish priest tells her, if it comes again, to ask "In God's name, who are you and what do you want of me?"; and the third occurs on the road home, when the figure identifies herself as the Queen of Heaven and gives the full message.

5.2 The three narratives side by side

Element	Starr (copyright 1871)	Pernin (1874)	Current custodial narrative
Year	“Twelve years ago” from a text copyright-entered 1871: 1859 or 1858	“Ten or twelve years ago” from an 1874 imprint: 1862–1864	1859
Day and month	Not given; “one summer day”	Not given; three successive Sundays	9 October, “believed to be” a Sunday, with a silent encounter some days earlier
Walk to Mass	Eleven miles	Two and a half leagues (English: seven and a half miles)	Ten miles
Number and setting of encounters	Three: returning; going, a few weeks later; returning that same afternoon	Three: all returning from Mass, on three successive Sundays	Three: an errand in the woods; going to Mass; returning from Mass
Companions	Not mentioned at the encounters	Present at the second and third; “a numerous escort, among whom were several men” at the third	Sister and a friend; they cannot see the figure and are told to kneel
Priest consulted between encounters	No	No	Yes, after Mass, and he supplies the form of the question
The figure	“White and shining,” face <i>covered with a veil</i> , hands joined, in a luminous atmosphere, as in pictures of the Immaculate Conception	“A Lady of great beauty and majestic mien,” suspended between two trees	Dazzling white, yellow sash, crown of stars, long golden wavy hair, light so strong the face can hardly be looked at
The two trees	Not mentioned	Mentioned, unidentified	Identified as “believed to be a maple and hemlock”
Who identifies the visitor	The seer recognizes “the Virgin Mother”	The seer addresses her as “my good mother”	The visitor: “I am the Queen of Heaven”
The seer’s opening words	“Dear Mistress, what do you wish me to do?”	“My good mother, what do you want of me?”	“In God’s name, who are you, and what do you want of me?”
General confession, Communion for sinners	Absent	Absent	Present
Warning of punishment	Absent	Absent	Present
Beatitude on the companions	Absent	Absent	Present
The vineyard rebuke	Absent	Absent	Present
Catechetical commission	Present, in full	Present, focused on First Communion	Present, in Starr’s wording
“Go and fear nothing, I will help you”	Absent	Present	Present
Annual commemoration	The Feast of the Assumption, 15 August	Twice a year, “at fixed epochs,” unnamed	9 October as the apparition anniversary; 8 October for the fire; 15 August also kept

5.3 The stratigraphy of the reported words

The most consequential result of the collation is textual rather than narrative. Set the received message beside Starr’s 1871 English and the overlap is not thematic; it is verbal, and close to exact.

Starr: “Gather around you the neglected children in this wild country, running idle about the woods, and teach them what they should know for salvation. . . . Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the

cross, and how to approach the sacraments. This is what I wish you to do.” And Adele’s objection: “but how shall I teach them, who know so little myself?”

The received text: “Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation. . . . Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do.” And the objection: “But how shall I teach them who know so little myself?”

The received closing clause, “Go and fear nothing, I will help you,” is likewise Pernin’s English, “Go, and fear nothing; I will help you.” And the received narrative’s “wrapped as it were in a luminous atmosphere” reproduces Starr’s distinctive phrase for the vision’s disappearance.

Element of the reported message	Earliest witness located	Evidentiary remark
Catechetical commission (“gather the children. . . what they should know for salvation”; catechism, sign of the cross, approach to the sacraments; the seer’s objection)	Starr, copyright-entered 1871	Received in Starr’s English almost word for word; the earliest located form of the message and its stable core
First Communion and the children who “receive Him without knowing what they do”	Pernin, 1874	Not in Starr; not in the received text either, which has dropped it
“Go and fear nothing, I will help you”	Pernin, 1874	Received verbatim; the one received clause with an 1870s witness that Starr lacks
“Luminous atmosphere”	Starr, 1871	A narrative phrase, not a spoken word, carried into the received narration
Self-identification as Queen of Heaven	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Absent from both nineteenth-century witnesses, in each of which the identification is made by the seer
General confession; Communion offered for the conversion of sinners	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Absent from both
“If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them”	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Absent from both; also elided from the 2010 decree’s own quotation
“Blessed are they that believe without seeing”	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Presupposes the companions’ question, which neither witness reports
“What are you doing here in idleness while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?”	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Absent from both. Starr’s only “idle” is the children “running idle about the woods”
Crown of stars, yellow sash, golden hair	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Starr’s figure is explicitly veiled
Maple and hemlock	Not located before the received custodial narrative	Pernin has two unidentified trees; the shrine says “believed to be”

Two cautions belong immediately beside that table. First, “not located before the received custodial narrative” means exactly that: this study did not reach Sister M. Dominica’s shrine history of 1955, the shrine’s archival files, or any intermediate printing, and the elements in question may well be attested in one of them at a date this study cannot see. The claim is about the reach of the searches described in Appendix A, not about the history of the tradition. Second, the 2010 decree’s quotation of the message includes the Queen of Heaven, the general confession, and the Communion offered for sinners; it is the punishment clause, the beatitude, and the vineyard rebuke that its ellipses pass over. §7.4 examines that quotation as a quotation.

Project synthesis — the received message is a composite with a datable core

This study judges, on the verbal evidence set out above, that the message now received at Champion is a composite English text whose catechetical core reproduces the wording Eliza Allen Starr printed in 1871 and whose closing

clause reproduces the wording Peter Pernin printed in 1874, with a further stratum — self-identification, general confession, punishment, beatitude, vineyard — that this study could not trace to any nineteenth-century witness it reached. The degree of verbal identity in the core is too high to be coincidence: two independent English renderings of a Walloon conversation, made by different people from different informants, do not converge on “teach them what they should know for salvation” and “how to sign themselves with the sign of the cross” and “that is what I wish you to do.” Somewhere in the chain, the received English descends from printed English.

The strongest counterargument, stated at its strongest: Adele lived until 1896 and told the story for thirty-seven years after Starr printed it. A fixed English formula could have entered *her own* retelling — read to her, or repeated to her by the sisters — and been transmitted from her lips as the received wording, in which case the verbal identity proves textual continuity without proving that the later strata are late. On that account the fuller message could be material Starr and Pernin compressed away and Adele went on telling to people who wrote it down after 1874. This is a serious reply and this study cannot refute it from the sources it reached.

What would change the judgment: any dated witness earlier than the 1955 shrine history — a letter, a parish or diocesan record, a newspaper notice, a printed pamphlet, a chapel inscription — carrying the self-identification as Queen of Heaven, the command of general confession, or the punishment clause. A single such witness would move those elements out of the “not located” row and into the documented tradition, and this study would record that it had been wrong about their date.

5.4 The calendar of the cult, and where the anniversary moved

One further result falls out of the collation, and it has gone unremarked in every account of Champion this study saw. The date on which the apparition is commemorated has moved.

Starr, the earliest witness, is unambiguous: “Every year, on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, a religious procession celebrates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin to Sister Adele.” The commemoration is annual, it is on 15 August, and its stated object is the apparition itself. Pernin, three years later, records two solemn processions a year “at fixed epochs” and does not name either date. The shrine’s own timeline places the beginning of “devotions on the 15th of August” in 1871, in the entry for the fire — which cannot be right if Starr was describing an established annual custom in a volume copyright-entered that same year.²¹

Today the shrine keeps 8 October for the “Miracle of the Great Fire” with an all-night vigil, 9 October as the solemnity of Our Lady of Champion and the apparition anniversary, 15 August for the Assumption, and the first Saturday of May for the Walk to Mary. Of these, 9 October is the one the shrine itself hedges: it is “what is believed to be” the day, and “the date historians believe marks the anniversary of Mary’s last appearance.”²²

Project synthesis — the October date is anchored to the fire, not to the earliest cult

This study judges that the earliest attested commemoration of the Champion apparition was kept on 15 August, and that the October anniversary is a later fixture whose gravitational centre is the fire of 8 October 1871 rather than any early memory of the day of the events. The reasons are that the only nineteenth-century witness to name a date names 15 August and attaches it to the apparition; that neither nineteenth-century witness gives any day or month for the events at all; that the 2010 decree fixes the month of October and conspicuously does not fix a day; and that the received day, 9 October, sits immediately after the fire anniversary and is presented by the shrine itself with “believed to be.”

The strongest counterargument is that the two facts are independent: the settlement might always have known the events fell in early October, and the fire’s falling on 8 October in the twelfth year afterwards — which the shrine describes as “almost twelve years to the date” — would then be the coincidence that fixed public attention on the date rather than the cause of it. A community can easily keep a summer procession on a great Marian feast for convenience while remembering an autumn anniversary privately. That is entirely possible, and it is why this study’s claim is about attestation rather than about origin.

What would change the judgment is any pre-1871 source giving a day or month for the events, or any pre-1955 source giving 9 October as the apparition’s day independently of the fire’s anniversary.

5.5 What none of this touches

The stratigraphy above is a statement about texts. It is not a statement about whether the events occurred, and it is not a challenge to the 2010 decree, which judges “the substance” of the events and does not adopt any particular wording as authentic. It is also not a reason to stop using the received message in prayer. A devotional text whose earliest located form is a catechetical commission and whose later form calls for conversion, penance, and confession is not teaching anything the Church does not teach in its own name. What the stratigraphy forbids is one specific move: treating any sentence of the received message as a transcript of what was said in a Wisconsin wood in 1859, and then reasoning from the exact words as if they had the authority of Scripture. That move is forbidden anyway, for every private revelation, on grounds that have nothing to do with textual criticism.

6 The Night of 8 October 1871

6.1 What burned, and where

On the night of 8 October 1871 — the same night as the Chicago fire — firestorms swept both shores of Green Bay. The compilation published at Green Bay within weeks by Frank Tilton describes “the terrible and unparalleled conflagrations that desolated the North Eastern counties of Wisconsin on the night of October 8th, 1871, and in a few short hours swept from Time into Eternity more than a thousand men, women and children, rendered about four thousand people homeless and utterly destitute.”²³

Champion is on the east shore. It was not, strictly, in the Peshtigo fire. Tilton is careful about this: the east-shore firestorm “followed the same general direction of the one on the west shore, while it was distinct from it, the two being about thirty miles apart, and no noticeable gale occurring on the bay lying between.” Pernin says the same thing from the other side, placing the Robinsonville event “at nine or ten leagues distance” from Peshtigo, “farther separated from it by the waters of Green Bay.” The popular name “the Peshtigo fire,” applied to Champion, names the night and the regional catastrophe, not the identical flame front.²⁴

Tilton’s description of the east-shore track is where the Champion question becomes sharp:

Tilton, *Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin* (Green Bay, 1871), ch. XIV, on the east shore of Green Bay

The largest settlements destroyed in this track of fire were known as New Franken, Walhein, Robinsonville, Harris’ Pier, Thiry Daems, Dyckesville, St. Sauveur, Rosiere, Williamsonville and Forestville. None of these were villages, but they were either agricultural or lumbering communities, or settlements around religious institutions. . . . The district burned over here covered an area of fully 500 square miles, and in that extent of country the desolation was almost complete. If a building escaped it was an exception to the general rule.²⁵

So the earliest account of the east-shore fire that this study located — compiled at Green Bay, within weeks, by a writer collecting relief subscriptions and eyewitness statements — names Robinsonville among the settlements destroyed, records no exception there, and does not mention a chapel, a procession, or a preservation. It says in the same breath that a surviving building anywhere in the district “was an exception to the general rule,” which shows that Tilton was alert to exceptions and thought them worth remarking.

That is an argument from silence, and it has the ordinary weaknesses of one. Tilton was compiling at speed, from the west shore’s perspective, for a relief-fundraising volume; Robinsonville was a Walloon-speaking Catholic settlement with no newspaper and no obvious channel into his sources; a chapel and a schoolhouse inside a six-acre fence would not have altered his casualty tables. His list of “settlements destroyed” is a list of places the fire went through, not a building-by-building survey. The silence is real, and it is not decisive.

6.2 What Pernin reports

Three years later, Pernin gives the account that everything since depends on. It is short, and it is worth having exactly.

Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, Appendix, printed pp. 99–101 (Montreal, 1874), with the French collated

On the 8th of October, 1871, this Belgian colony was visited by the same whirlwind of wind and fire that overwhelmed Peshtigo, and though the destruction of human life was less great than in the latter place, it nevertheless reduced to ashes, farms, houses and timber, covering a surface several leagues in extent. Now, when the hurricane burst forth, those pious girls said between each other: “If the Blessed Virgin still has need of us, she will protect our lives, if not, we must succumb to the fiery death awaiting us.” Filled with confidence and resignation, they hastened to the chapel, reverently raised the statue of Our Lady, and kneeling, bore it in procession around their beloved Sanctuary, reciting their beads. When flame and wind blew so strongly in the direction of the chapel as to prevent their farther progress, unless they exposed themselves to suffocation, they awaited a lull in the storm, or turning in another direction, continued to hope and pray.

Thus passed for them the long hours of that terrible night. I know not if, supported only by nature, they would have been able to live through that awful ordeal, but I feel convinced they could not have done it, at Peshtigo, without a miracle.

Morning’s light revealed the deplorable ravages wrought by the conflagration. All the houses and fences in the neighborhood had been burned, with the exception of the school, the chapel and fence surrounding the six acres of land consecrated to the Blessed Virgin. This paling had been charred in several places, but the fire, as if it had been a sentient being, whilst consuming everything in the vicinity, the winding path surrounding the enclosure being only eight or ten feet wide, had respected this spot, sanctified by the visible presence of the Mother of God, and it now shone out like an emerald island amid a sea of ashes.²⁶

Pernin then adds, under the heading “Important consideration”:

Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, printed p. 101, “Important consideration”

In relating the preceding fact I have no intention of pronouncing it a miracle, no more than I would adventure to qualify as miracle the preservation of the tabernacle in the midst of the fires of Peshtigo. These two facts greatly edified myself, enlivening my faith and hope, and in narrating them I have no other aim than that of edifying others. I have no intention either of passing judgment on the apparition of the Blessed Virgin and on the pious pilgrimages which have resulted from it. Ecclesiastical authority has not as yet spoken on the subject; it silently allows the good work to advance, awaiting perhaps some proof more striking and irrefutable before pronouncing its fiat. Far from me be the thought of forestalling ecclesiastical judgment.²⁷

Everything in that account, and nothing beyond it, is what Pernin witnesses. Note in particular who is present: “those pious girls,” *ces pieuses filles* — the five or six young women who had joined Adele, introduced two pages earlier. Pernin describes a small community praying round its own enclosure. He does not describe a refugee crowd, livestock, a well, or rain. He does not say the fire was extinguished; he says that morning came and the enclosure was intact. And he twice declines, in terms, to call any of it a miracle or to anticipate the judgment of the Church.

6.3 A quotation that is not Pernin’s

The shrine’s current narrative of the fire introduces a paragraph with the words: “The following is the account of Father Peter Pernin, a local priest who described the grounds after the events.” The paragraph runs:

Paragraph attributed to “Fr. Peter Pernin” on the National Shrine’s “Our Story” page, read 2026-07-25

After hours of horror and suspense, the heavens sent relief in the form of a downpour. The fervent prayers to the Mother of God were heard. The fire was extinguished, but dawn revealed the ravages wrought by the conflagration. Everything about them was destroyed; miles of desolation everywhere. But the convent, school, and chapel on the holy land consecrated to the Virgin Mary shone like an emerald isle in a sea of ashes. The raging fire licked the outside palings and left charred scars as mementos. Tongues of fire had reached the chapel fence, and threatened destruction to all within its confines; the fire had not entered the Chapel grounds.²⁸

This study collated that paragraph against both 1874 printings of Pernin’s book, English and French, in full. It is not his text. The resemblance is confined to one image — the emerald isle in a sea of ashes — and to the charred palings. Everything that carries weight in the paragraph is absent from Pernin:

In the paragraph attributed to Pernin	In Pernin, 1874, English and French
“After hours of horror and suspense, the heavens sent relief in the form of a downpour.”	No rain of any kind, in either language. Pernin’s transition is simply “Morning’s light revealed” / “ <i>Le matin venu, on constata.</i> ”
“The fire was extinguished.”	Pernin never says the fire was extinguished; he reports what daylight showed.
“The convent, school, and chapel.”	“The school, the chapel and fence surrounding the six acres.” No convent.
“The fervent prayers to the Mother of God were heard.”	Pernin declines to draw the conclusion: “I have no intention of pronouncing it a miracle.”
“Everything about them was destroyed; miles of desolation everywhere.”	“All the houses and fences in the neighborhood had been burned,” with the enclosure excepted. Comparable in substance.
“Shone like an emerald isle in a sea of ashes”; the charred palings	“Shone out like an emerald island amid a sea of ashes”; “this paling had been charred in several places.” The only genuine verbal correspondence.

This study does not know where the paragraph comes from, and says so. It reads as a later retelling of Pernin — possibly the shrine’s own mid-twentieth-century history, which this study could not reach — that has acquired his name in transmission. What can be said with confidence is narrower and sufficient: the rain, the extinguishing of the fire, the answered prayer, and the convent are not in the 1874 text, and any argument that rests on Pernin’s authority for them rests on nothing.

6.4 What the 2010 decree says about the fire

The decree includes the fire among its recitals, in one sentence:

Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 2, recital

This holy place was preserved from the infamous Peshtigo fire of 1871, when many of the faithful gathered here with Adele and prayed through the intercession of Our Lady of Good Help, with the result that the fire that devastated everything in its wake in this entire area stopped when it reached the parameters of the Shrine.²⁹

Two things follow, and they are easy to conflate. The fire is part of the decree’s *reasoning*: it belongs to the recitals that establish a continuous history of faith and devotion at the site. It is not part of the decree’s *object*: the operative clause judges the events, apparitions, and locutions of October 1859, and nothing else. The decree’s only explicit statement about miracles cuts the other way and covers the reported cures: “though none of these favors have been officially declared a miracle by the Church, they are clear evidence of spiritual fruitfulness.”³⁰ No competent authority has declared the preservation of 8 October 1871 a miracle, and the decree does not do so.

Project synthesis — what the fire evidence will carry

This study judges that the record supports the following and no more. **Carried:** that the east-shore firestorm of the night of 8 October 1871 passed through the Robinsonville settlement and destroyed it, on the testimony of a Green Bay compilation of the same year; that a small community of women spent that night praying and processing with a statue around a fenced six-acre enclosure; and that the next morning the school, the chapel, and the fence stood, charred but not consumed, amid general destruction, on the testimony of a priest writing three years later who had access to the participants and who published his account under an episcopal recommendation. **Not carried:** rain; the extinguishing of the fire; a refugee crowd; livestock at the chapel; the shallow well; and any of these on Pernin’s authority. **Not adjudicated by anyone:** whether the preservation was miraculous. Pernin declined to say; the 2010 decree recites the fact and does not declare it; no other competent act was located.

The strongest counterargument is that Tilton’s silence proves nothing and that oral tradition in a small Walloon settlement could preserve the rain, the crowd, and the cattle perfectly well for eighty years before anybody wrote them down — and that survivors’ descendants still keep the anniversary, which is itself a form of transmission. That is fair, and it is why this study classifies those elements as undocumented rather than as false. What would

move them into the carried column is any dated record before 1955 — a diocesan or parish note, a newspaper account, a letter, a claim in the fire-relief papers — that reports the crowd, the animals, or the rain. What would move them out is a demonstration that they first appear in a mid-twentieth-century retelling.

6.5 A pastoral note that belongs beside the claim

The east-shore firestorm killed people. Tilton counts about 130 dead in the peninsula track and 117 of them in Door County alone; the two shores together took more than a thousand lives. A preservation narrative told without that fact becomes something the sources themselves refuse: an implied verdict on the faith of the dead. Pernin, who was in the river at Peshtigo while his own parishioners burned, never draws it. Neither does the 2010 decree. Neither may anyone else. Whatever happened inside that fence, it is not evidence about the souls outside it.

7 The Inquiry and the Decree of 8 December 2010

7.1 The inquiry as the decree describes it

The decree is the only account of the inquiry that this study reached. The shrine reports that the bishop opened a formal investigation in 2009 and that a commission reviewed the history of the apparitions, the life of Adele, and their consistency with public Revelation; the commission's membership, mandate, terms of reference, and reports were not located, and no sentence here depends on them.³¹

What the decree itself says is this:

Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 3, the experts' brief and findings

Three Marian experts have studied the history of this alleged apparition and all of the extant documents, letters, and written testimonies in order to determine whether or not there are inherent contradictions or objections to the veracity of the testimony given by Adele Brise with regard to the events of 1859 and to establish whether or not there is enough evidence to suggest that the events which happened to Adele Brise may be of a supernatural origin.

The accounts of the apparitions and locutions are judged to be free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith.

There is nothing in the person and character of Adele Brise that would question the veracity of the substance of her account. In fact, her personal character is a major factor in favor of the recognition of the apparition.³²

Notice the shape of the brief. The experts were asked two questions: whether the testimony contains inherent contradictions or objections, and whether there is enough evidence *to suggest* that the events *may be* of supernatural origin. Both are threshold questions. Neither asks the experts to establish supernatural origin, and the decree does not report that they did. The judgment with moral certainty is the bishop's own act, made on the whole record — documents, character, fruits, and the 151-year history — and not a transcription of an expert conclusion. That distinction is in the decree's own architecture, and it is worth preserving, because summaries routinely report that "experts determined the apparitions were supernatural," which the decree does not say.

7.2 The decree read against the norms then in force

The regime in force on 8 December 2010 was the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's Norms of 25 February 1978. Their preliminary note lays out a three-step path for the competent ecclesiastical authority: first, "to judge the fact according to positive and negative criteria"; then, if the examination is favourable, "to permit some public manifestation of cult or of devotion . . . (equivalent to the formula, 'for now, nothing stands in the way') (*pro nunc nihil obstare*)"; and "finally, in light of time passed and of experience, with special regard to the fecundity of spiritual fruit generated from this new devotion, to express a judgment regarding the authenticity and supernatural character if the case so merits."³³

Champion arrived at that third step by an unusual route. The cult was not new and had never been forbidden: it had run continuously since the 1860s, with a chapel, processions, and the presence of successive bishops, without any

judgment of the fact at all — exactly the situation Pernin described in 1874, when “ecclesiastical authority has not as yet spoken on the subject; it silently allows the good work to advance.” The 1978 Norms’ second step had, in effect, been lived through for a century and a half before the first step was formally taken. The decree’s title, *on the Authenticity of the Apparitions*, and its heavy reliance on the “uninterrupted history of faith and devotion” and on “spiritual fruits” are precisely the third step’s own vocabulary: “in light of time passed and of experience, with special regard to the fecundity of spiritual fruit.”

The decree’s four substantive findings map onto the 1978 positive criteria one for one, and the correspondence is close enough to be deliberate:

1978 Norms, positive criteria (I.A)	Corresponding finding in the 2010 decree
A)a) Moral certitude, or at least great probability of the existence of the fact, acquired by means of a serious investigation	“to declare with moral certainty”; the study by three experts of “all of the extant documents, letters, and written testimonies”
A)b)1 Personal qualities of the subject: psychological equilibrium, honesty and rectitude of moral life, sincerity and habitual docility towards ecclesiastical authority	“clear testimony to the upright character of Adele Brise”; “ever obedient to the authorities of the Church and steadfast in the mission”; “her personal character is a major factor in favor of the recognition”
A)b)2 As regards revelation: true theological and spiritual doctrine and immune from error	“The accounts of the apparitions and locutions are judged to be free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith”
A)b)3 Healthy devotion and abundant and constant spiritual fruit	“the uninterrupted history of faith and devotion testifies to the spiritual fruits bestowed upon the pilgrims”; conversions; graces through Mass and Reconciliation; answered prayer

The 1978 Norms add that the criteria “are not peremptory but rather indicative, and they should be applied cumulatively or with some mutual convergence.” That is exactly the argument the decree makes when it answers the objection from thin documentation by appealing to “coherence between event and consequences, personality of the seer and commitment to the mission received” — convergence, not proof.

7.3 The negative criteria, and what the decree does not say

The 1978 Norms set five negative criteria beside the positive ones: manifest error concerning the fact; doctrinal errors attributed to God, the Blessed Virgin, or a saint; “evidence of a search for profit or gain strictly connected to the fact”; gravely immoral acts by the subject or the subject’s followers in connection with the fact; and psychological disorder or psychopathic tendencies, psychosis, or collective hysteria.³⁴

The decree engages the second of these directly and thoroughly: the accounts are “free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith.” It engages the first obliquely, through the experts’ brief to determine whether the testimony contains “inherent contradictions or objections.” The remaining three it does not mention. Two readings of that silence are available, and honesty requires putting both.

The unfavourable reading is that a decree which recites at length what tells in favour, and is silent on the whole class of disqualifying considerations, has published only one side of its own examination. The favourable reading — which this study finds much the stronger — is that the Norms make the criteria indicative and cumulative rather than a checklist, that the third, fourth, and fifth simply have no purchase on this case, and that a bishop is not obliged to publish a finding that no evidence of profiteering, immorality, or mental disorder was found in a woman who died in 1896. There is also nothing to examine in the ordinary way: the negative criteria are largely addressed to living visionaries and active movements, and Champion had neither at any point in the inquiry.

What the silence does mean is that the decree should not be read as having adjudicated those questions. It found what it says it found.

7.4 What the decree quotes, and what it passes over

The decree's second recital gives the reported message, and the quotation is worth examining as a quotation, because its ellipses are selective in a way that repays attention. It reads:

Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 1, the message as the decree quotes it

"I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners, and I wish you to do the same. You received Holy Communion this morning and that is well. But you must do more. Make a general confession and offer Communion for the conversion of sinners. . . Gather the children in this wild country and teach them what they should know for salvation. . . Teach them their catechism, how to sign themselves with the sign of the Cross, and how to approach the sacraments; that is what I wish you to do. Go and fear nothing, I will help you."³⁵

Set that against the received narrative and the two ellipses turn out to fall exactly where the difficult material is. The first passes over "If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them." The second passes over the companions' question, the beatitude "Blessed are they that believe without seeing," and the rebuke "What are you doing here in idleness while your companions are working in the vineyard of my Son?" What survives the compression is a two-fold mission — prayer for the conversion of sinners, and catechesis — which is precisely how the decree characterizes the message in the sentence that introduces the quotation.

This study does not infer an intention from that. An ellipsis in a recital is not a censure, the punishment clause is not in itself objectionable, and a bishop quoting a long message in a four-page decree must cut somewhere. What can be said is narrower and still useful: the reported words that the competent authority chose to place on the face of his own act are the identification, the call to conversion and confession, and the catechetical commission — and the warning of punishment is not among them. Anyone who presents the punishment clause as part of what the Church approved at Champion is adding something the approving instrument left out.

7.5 Was Rome involved?

The decree names no Roman act. It is issued "by the Grace of God and the Authority of the Apostolic See, Bishop of Green Bay" — the ordinary formula of a diocesan bishop's title, not a claim of delegated Roman authority for this act — and it declares "in accord with the norms of the Church," without naming which.

Under the 1978 Norms, no Roman act was required. Part III.1 gives the duty of vigilance and intervention "above all" to the Ordinary of the place; Part IV.2 provides that it is for the Congregation "to judge and approve the Ordinary's way of proceeding," which is a review power, not a condition precedent. On the face of the law then in force, a diocesan bishop could conclude such a case himself.

But the decree's silence proves nothing either way, and the reason is documented by the Dicastery itself. In presenting the 2024 Norms, Cardinal Fernández described the practice that had prevailed until then:

Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, presentation of the *Norms* of 17 May 2024, on the practice before 2024

In dealing with such cases, and especially when preparing an official statement, some Bishops sought the necessary prior authorization from the Dicastery. Then, when granted that permission, Bishops were asked not to mention the Dicastery in their statement. . . . In these situations, the Bishop could not even mention that the Dicastery had given its approval.³⁶

This study therefore records an unresolvable point rather than an answer: whether the Holy See authorized, reviewed, or was consulted about the Champion decree cannot be determined from the decree, because in that period a bishop who had obtained such authorization would have been asked to say nothing about it. No document establishing Roman involvement was located, and none establishing its absence.

7.6 An anachronism in the recitals

One recital will not bear its own weight, and it is better to say so than to repeat it. The decree's final recital before the operative clause reads: "All of my esteemed predecessor Bishops of the Diocese of Green Bay for the past one hundred and fifty-one years have been present for special Masses in Honor of Our Lady of Good Help, and some

of them have even actively promoted the Shrine.”³⁷ The Diocese of Green Bay was established in 1868, nine years after October 1859; its first bishop, Joseph Melcher, took office that year.³⁸ The 151 years is the interval since the apparitions, not a span over which Green Bay bishops existed. Read as devotional rhetoric about episcopal continuity, the recital is unobjectionable; read as a historical statement, it is loose. Nothing in the operative clause depends on it.

7.7 What the decree obliges, and what it does not

Established by the decree of 8 December 2010	Left open, or expressly not established
That the competent authority, the Bishop of Green Bay, judged with moral certainty that the events, apparitions, and locutions given to Adele Brise in October 1859 exhibit the substance of supernatural character	Any particular day within October 1859; any number, sequence, or setting of encounters; any description of the figure; any wording of the message
That those apparitions are approved as worthy of belief by the Christian faithful	That any member of the faithful is obliged to believe them: the decree’s own parenthesis is “although not obligatory”
That the accounts are free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith	That the accounts are historically accurate in detail, or that any transmitted sentence is a record of words spoken
That the character of Adele Brise is upright and is a major factor in favour of recognition	Anything about her sanctity in the technical sense; heroic virtue is the object of a separate process (§8)
That the reported favours are clear evidence of spiritual fruitfulness	That any of them is a miracle: “none of these favors have been officially declared a miracle by the Church”
That the site was preserved in the fire of 1871 and that this belongs to the history of devotion	That the preservation is a miracle, or that it was foretold, or that it bears on the fate of those who died
That the faithful are encouraged to frequent the shrine	That pilgrimage, the message, or the devotion is required of anyone

The last of these is the point on which the doctrine of private revelation turns, and it is not a diminishment of the decree. Even the strongest positive judgment leaves the faithful with what Benedict XVI called “a help which is proffered,” whose “use is not obligatory,” and asks a prudent human adherence rather than the divine and Catholic faith owed to Revelation. The 1978 Norms make the same point from the disciplinary side: authorities permitting cult “must be careful that the faithful not interpret this practice as approval of the supernatural nature of the fact on the part of the Church.”³⁹ At Champion the bishop did reach the further judgment; and even there, he wrote the limit into the operative sentence himself.

8 After 2010: Shrine, Title, Solemnity, Cause, and the 2024 Norms

8.1 Shrine status is a separate legal category

The 1983 Code defines a shrine as “a church or other sacred place to which numerous members of the faithful make pilgrimage for a special reason of piety, with the approval of the local ordinary,” and adds: “For a shrine to be called a national shrine, the conference of bishops must give its approval; for it to be called an international shrine, the approval of the Holy See is required.”⁴⁰

That is the whole content of the category. A national shrine is a place of pilgrimage whose title the conference of bishops has approved. It is not an apparition judgment, and it cannot become one: the conference’s competence under can. 1231 is over the name of the place, not over the supernatural character of anything that happened there.

The National Shrine reports that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops designated the grounds a national shrine on 19 March 2016, and describes the result as “the first National Shrine in the U.S. with an approved Marian Apparition.”⁴¹ This study reports that as the custodian’s statement and does not verify it. It also declines to evaluate the superlative. Whether a given site is the first or only American apparition site with a positive judgment is a claim about a corpus, and no reproducible universal register of apparition judgments exists against which such a claim could be tested; a superlative of that kind would require the register, not an inference from one decree.

8.2 The change of title, and the annual solemnity

Two things happened in 2023 that are constantly run together. The devotion’s title changed from Our Lady of Good Help to Our Lady of Champion, and an annual celebration of Our Lady of Champion with the rank of a solemnity began to be kept at the shrine on 9 October, the first being celebrated on 9 October 2023. The shrine attributes the second to Rome: “In 2023, the National Shrine received word from the Holy See’s Dicastery of Divine Worship in Rome, confirming the Shrine’s ability to celebrate a Solemnity Mass of Our Lady of Champion on the grounds of the Shrine every year.”⁴²

Three observations, each modest and each worth making.

First, the older title was a translation. The shrine reports that the inscription over the 1861 chapel read *Notre Dame de Bon Secours, Priez Pour Nous*; “Our Lady of Good Help” renders it.⁴³ The 2010 decree is issued under that title, and a change of the devotional title does not alter the object or the effect of an act already made under the old one.

Second, the new title is a place name whose place name postdates the events. The shrine’s own timeline records that the settlement was called Robinsonville until some point between 1890 and 1896, when it took the name Champion. Both nineteenth-century witnesses used in this study write “Robinsonville.” Nothing turns on this except accuracy in citation: a nineteenth-century source that says Robinsonville and a modern source that says Champion are naming the same place.

Third, the liturgical grant and the apparition judgment are different objects. A permission to keep a proper celebration at a shrine on a given day concerns worship at that place. It presupposes the devotion; it does not re-judge the events, and no dicastery competent for liturgy could re-judge them.

8.3 The cause of Adele Brise

Adele Brise is now styled Servant of God, which means that a cause of canonization has been introduced.⁴⁴ It does not mean that heroic virtue has been recognized, and it certainly does not mean beatification or canonization.

One point of law deserves emphasis, because it is the place where a cause and an apparition are most often confused. The 2024 Norms state it in their own voice:

DDF, *Norms* of 17 May 2024, I, n. 13

Even when a *Nihil obstat* is granted for canonization processes, this does not imply a declaration of authenticity regarding any supernatural phenomena present in a person’s life.⁴⁵

Whatever the cause of Adele Brise reaches, and however far it goes, it will add nothing to the status of the 1859 events. The two proceedings have different objects, different competent authorities, and different criteria. A beatification would establish heroic virtue, not an apparition; and the 2010 decree, conversely, established nothing about her sanctity.

8.4 What the 2024 Norms did, and did not do, to a 2010 act

On 17 May 2024 the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith promulgated new *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*, effective 19 May 2024. Their art. 27 is a single sentence: “These *Norms* entirely replace the previous *Norms* of 25 February 1978.”⁴⁶

Three features of the new regime bear on Champion.

The procedure changed. Under art. 1, the diocesan bishop examines the case and formulates a judgment, but “the judgment of the Bishop is to be submitted to the Dicastery for approval”; under art. 2, the Dicastery evaluates the bishop’s way of proceeding and approves or does not approve the determination he proposes. Roman approval is now a condition, not a review power.

The available conclusions changed. The six determinations are *Nihil obstat*, *Prae oculis habeatur*, *Curatur*, *Sub mandato*, *Prohibetur et obstruatur*, and *Declaratio de non supernaturalitate*. And n. 11 states that “as a general rule, it is not foreseen in these *Norms* that ecclesiastical authority would give a positive recognition of the divine origin of

alleged supernatural phenomena,” reaffirmed at n. 23, with the reservation that “the Holy Father can authorize a special procedure in this regard.”

There is no transitional article. The 2024 Norms say nothing about cases already concluded. They do not confirm, ratify, revisit, relabel, or abrogate prior judgments, and no mechanism is provided for translating a pre-2024 determination into one of the six new terms.

Project synthesis — the standing of the 2010 decree under the 2024 Norms

This study judges that the decree of 8 December 2010 stands, in its own historical formula and with its own scope, and that it must not be restated in the vocabulary of the 2024 Norms. The reasons are three. The act was complete and validly made under the law then in force; the 2024 Norms replaced that law prospectively, for proceeding, and legislated nothing about concluded cases; and there is no term in the new taxonomy that means what “do exhibit the substance of supernatural character” meant in 2010, so any translation would either inflate or deflate the judgment. In particular, calling Champion a *Nihil obstat* site would be an error in both directions: a *Nihil obstat* expresses no certainty about supernatural authenticity, which the 2010 decree does express, and it is granted by the Dicastery, which the 2010 decree was not.

It follows, and is worth stating plainly, that a decree in the 2010 form could not be issued today. Under nn. 11 and 23 a positive recognition of divine origin is not foreseen as a rule, and under arts. 1–2 no determination becomes public without the Dicastery’s approval. Champion is therefore a legacy judgment: intact, and of a kind the current procedure does not ordinarily produce.

The strongest counterargument is that a general replacement of the governing norms could be read as unsettling every judgment made under them, so that Champion’s status is now merely tolerated rather than positively established, and that the Dicastery’s standing reservation of the right to intervene (art. 22 §3, addressed to *Nihil obstat* cases) shows how provisional such matters are. This study rejects that reading, because a change in procedure does not of itself revoke acts validly completed under the earlier procedure, and because no organ of the Holy See has said anything of the kind about Champion. What would change the judgment is any act of the Dicastery — a decree, a note, a letter, an entry in a published index — addressing Champion by name. None was located.

8.5 The acts, with the witness used for each

Date	Authority and act	Object established	Witness used
October 1859	— (no act; the reported events)	Nothing established by authority; the object later judged	Starr 1871; Pernin 1874; custodial narrative
1868	Erection of the Diocese of Green Bay	The competent authority for the site thereafter	Diocesan list of past bishops, read 2026-07-25
by 1874	Conveyance of the six-acre enclosure to the Bishop of Green Bay	Ecclesiastical ownership of the site; not a judgment of the events	Pernin 1874, pp. 98–99
8 December 2010	Decree of Bishop David L. Ricken	The events, apparitions, and locutions of October 1859 exhibit the substance of supernatural character; approved as worthy of belief, not obligatory	Signed four-page decree, p. 4, read as page image
19 March 2016 (reported)	Designation as a national shrine by the USCCB	The title of the place under can. 1231; no judgment of events	Shrine timeline only; conference act not reached
2023 (reported)	Word from the Dicastery for Divine Worship; change of title; inaugural solemnity 9 October	A proper celebration at the shrine; a devotional title; no judgment of events	Shrine pages only; instruments not reached
19 May 2024	Entry into force of the DDF <i>Norms</i> of 17 May 2024	Replacement of the 1978 Norms for proceeding; no provision on concluded cases	Vatican English text, art. 27
undated here	Introduction of the cause of Adele Brise	The title Servant of God; nothing about the apparitions (Norms, n. 13)	Shrine usage; dated acts not reached

9 Project Synthesis: The Judgment of This Study

9.1 The judgment

Project synthesis — the governing judgment of this study, with its reasons

This study judges that at Champion the ecclesial judgment and the documentary record are two different objects, and that the honest description of the case is: a valid, complete, and unusually candid diocesan approval, resting deliberately on coherence and fruits rather than on documents, of an event stratum for which no contemporary documentation exists and for which the earliest published narratives, twelve and fifteen years later, disagree with each other and contain neither the self-identification nor the warning that now stand at the centre of the received message. Both halves of that sentence are load-bearing. Neither half is a concession to the other.

Reason one: the decree says so itself. It records that “the documents from the early history of the Shrine are not abundant” and answers the objection by appeal to coherence between event, consequences, character, and mission — the 1978 Norms’ own method of “cumulative” and “convergent” application of indicative criteria. The bishop did not claim a documentary case and this study does not have to impute one to him.

Reason two: the two nineteenth-century witnesses cannot be harmonized. Starr has a summer day, eleven miles, an encounter on the return, a second going and a third returning some weeks later, and a veiled figure. Pernin has three successive Sundays all on the return, seven and a half miles, and a date ten or twelve years before 1874. Neither matches the other; neither matches the received sequence; and Pernin’s date does not even match the received year. A tradition with a firm early record does not do this.

Reason three: the received message is a composite whose core is printed English. The catechetical commission reproduces Starr’s 1871 wording almost verbatim; the closing clause reproduces Pernin’s 1874 wording; and the self-identification as Queen of Heaven, the general confession, the punishment clause, the beatitude, and the vineyard rebuke were not located in any witness this study reached before the current custodial narrative. Whatever the transmission history, the words now recited are continuous with print, not independent of it.

Reason four: the fire tradition has a hard core and a soft shell, and they are separable. The preservation of the enclosure is early, circumstantial, and attested by a priest who could be contradicted by living participants. The rain, the crowd, the livestock, and the well are not in that witness at all, and a paragraph supplying the rain circulates under his name that is not his text.

Reason five: none of this touches the decree’s object. The decree judges “the substance” of the October 1859 events. It adopts no day, no count, no sequence, no description, and no wording; it declares nothing a miracle; and it obliges no one. Every finding above is compatible with it, because the decree was drafted — carefully, as its qualifiers show — so that findings of this kind would be compatible with it.

9.2 The counterargument at its strongest

The best case against this study’s judgment is not that the collation is wrong. It is that the collation is beside the point, and it runs like this.

Adele Brise lived until 1896. She told this story for thirty-seven years after Starr printed four pages of it in a book for girls, in a settlement where the chapel, the school, the community, and the annual processions were all built around the telling. The people who eventually wrote the fuller version down — the sisters at the chapel, the Franciscans who took over in 1902, the historian of 1955 — stood in an unbroken chain of custody from the seer herself, in a community that had heard her tell it hundreds of times. To weigh a Chicago lecturer’s compression of a single interpreted conversation, or a Montreal fundraiser’s self-declared abridgement of “a long conversation,” *against* that chain is to mistake the accident of publication for the substance of transmission. On this account the fuller message is not a later accretion at all: it is what Adele always said, minus what two outside authors, for their own reasons, left out. The verbal identity with Starr proves only that somebody later reached for the printed English when writing the story down — which is what anyone would do — not that the content is late. And Pernin’s “ten or twelve years” is exactly the kind of error a man makes about somebody else’s biography.

That argument is strong. It cannot be refuted from the sources this study reached, and it is why every claim in §5 is phrased as a claim about the reach of searches rather than about the history of the tradition. It has one weakness, which this study thinks decisive but not conclusive: it explains why the fuller material might be old, and it does not produce a single dated witness that it is. Chains of custody are arguments about plausibility; they are not evidence about dates. Until a dated witness appears, the honest description of the self-identification, the general confession, and the punishment clause is “first located in the modern custodial narrative,” not “handed down from 1859.”

9.3 What would change the judgment

Four specific findings would move this study, and it is worth naming them precisely enough that anyone with access to the archives could check.

1. **Any dated document before 1955 containing the self-identification, the general confession, or the punishment clause.** A letter, a parish or diocesan record, a devotional pamphlet, a newspaper notice, a chapel inscription, a pilgrim’s account. One such witness would move those elements out of the “not located” row of the stratigraphy in §5 and require this study to withdraw its dating.
2. **Any dated document before 1955 reporting the refugee crowd, the livestock, the well, or the rain on the night of 8 October 1871.** The same consequence for §6.
3. **The source of the paragraph attributed to Pernin.** If it turns out to be a genuine Pernin text — a later edition, a periodical article, a manuscript — the misattribution finding in §6 collapses and this study was wrong. If it turns out to be a twentieth-century retelling, the finding is confirmed and the attribution should be corrected wherever it appears.
4. **Any act of the Holy See concerning Champion.** A record of Roman authorization or review of the 2010 decree, or any later act naming Champion, would resolve the question left open in §7 and would bear on the standing discussed in §8.

9.4 Reading the message within the faith

The decree found the accounts “free from doctrinal error and consistent with the Catholic faith,” and this study has no basis to differ. But a message can be free from error and still be misread, and two of its clauses are misread often enough to deserve a paragraph each.

“I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners.” Whatever its date, this clause is orthodox exactly as it stands, and it is orthodox because of what it says Mary does: she prays. The Council states the boundary: “There is but one Mediator . . . The maternal duty of Mary toward men in no wise obscures or diminishes this unique mediation of Christ, but rather shows His power,” for her salvific influence “flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it.”⁴⁷ A queen who prays is a creature interceding, not a power negotiating. The message’s own logic makes the point: she asks Adele to do what she does — “I wish you to do the same” — which is intelligible only if what she does is something a Christian can imitate.

“If they do not convert and do penance, my Son will be obliged to punish them.” This is the clause that, read carelessly, produces the picture the Church has always refused: a merciful mother restraining an angry Son. Three things block that reading. The clause is conditional, and conditional warnings of this shape are the ordinary grammar of scriptural preaching — the summons to repentance is not a schedule of disasters. The Son is described as *obliged*, which locates the necessity in justice and in the sinner’s own refusal, not in a divine temper that intercession must cool. And the mediation is the wrong way round for the fearful reading: it is the Son’s merits that give the mother’s prayer whatever power it has, so that her intercession cannot be an alternative to him. Where the Council speaks of Mary as Advocate and Auxiliatrix it immediately adds that this “is to be so understood that it neither takes away from nor adds anything to the dignity and efficaciousness of Christ the one Mediator.”⁴⁸ A Champion devotion that leaves a pilgrim more afraid of Christ than before has inverted its own message.

There is also a reading of the fire that the sources forbid and that this study will not supply: the fires of 1871 were not a punishment foretold in 1859. No witness this study reached makes that connection. Pernin, who did read the catastrophe as a summons to repentance, never connects it to the apparition, and he had every opportunity: the two accounts stand within five pages of each other in his own book, and he draws no line between them.

9.5 What is left, and it is not small

Strip Champion of everything this study has been unable to date and what remains is this. In or about October 1859, in a Walloon settlement with no priest, an illiterate young Belgian immigrant woman became convinced that she had been told to gather the children of the woods and teach them their catechism, the sign of the cross, and how to approach the sacraments. She did it. She walked between settlements through rain and snow, was laughed at, taught for free, begged in Chicago in a black cape-bonnet for a schoolhouse, gathered five or six women who stayed, built a chapel on the spot, gave the land to her bishop, and kept it up until she died in 1896. Two independent outsiders — one writing for schoolgirls, one for fire relief — found the work impressive enough to publish, and both reported the same commission in substantially the same terms.

That is the part of the record that is not in doubt, and it is exactly the part the 2010 decree leans on when it speaks of “coherence between event and consequences, personality of the seer and commitment to the mission received.” It is also, in the end, the shape the message itself has: not a secret, not a chronology, not a prophecy, but a commission to teach children what they should know for salvation. A private revelation that adds nothing to Revelation and sends the hearer back to the catechism, the sign of the cross, and the sacraments is doing precisely what the Church says private revelation is for — “a help which is proffered,” whose whole business is “nourishing faith, hope and love, which are for everyone the permanent path of salvation.”⁴⁹

10 Notes

1. David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, *Decree on the Authenticity of the Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Diocese of Green Bay*, 8 December 2010, p. 4. Read 2026-07-25 in the four-page PDF published by the National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion at <https://championshrine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help-Declaration.pdf> (SHA-256 of the file as retrieved: b10ad96f0821fef8072164d6f83d3f33d9e008e1aa510d1c5706bbe53bbd664e). Pages 1–3 carry an extractable text layer; page 4, which bears the operative clause and the signatures, is an image, and its wording here was read directly from a 150 dpi rendering of that page. The bold emphasis on the operative sentence is the decree’s own. The page bears the signature of Bishop Ricken, the countersignature of the Chancellor, John F. Doerfler, and the diocesan seal with the attestation *Concordat cum Originali*. The diocesan original, and any protocol number or register entry, were not consulted (Appendix A). All web loci cited in these notes were read on 2026-07-25 unless another date is stated.
2. Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum* (18 November 1965), n. 4, quoted in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 66: “no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ.” For the standing account of what ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation means, see Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), n. 14, quoted in full at note 24 of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024): “Ecclesiastical approval of a private revelation essentially means that its message contains nothing contrary to faith and morals; it is licit to make it public and the faithful are authorized to give to it their adherence in a prudent manner. . . . It is a help which is proffered, but its use is not obligatory.” English text of the Norms read at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html.
3. Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms regarding the manner of proceeding in the discernment of presumed apparitions or revelations* (25 February 1978), III.1. English text read at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html. The Norms were approved by Paul VI on 24 February 1978 and dated 25 February 1978; they were signed by Cardinal Šeper as Prefect and Jérôme Hamer, O.P., as Secretary. This study makes no claim about when or in what form the text was first made publicly available; see Appendix A.
4. National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, “Our Story,” <https://championshrine.org/our-story/>, read 2026-07-25; the page carries a last-modified stamp of 2026-04-13. This study cites the page as the current custodial narrative of the shrine that holds the site, not as an independent historical witness.
5. Eliza Allen Starr, *Patron Saints*, chapter “St. Lioba,” at printed pp. 298–299 of the Baltimore reissue (John B. Piet & Co., 1883), read 2026-07-25 in the Internet Archive scan of the New York Public Library copy (identifier `patronsaints00star`); collated against the independent Google scan of the Chicago 1896 printing of the first series (identifier `PatronSaints1st2ndSeries`), which reproduces the same setting at the same page numbers. Starr writes that “only the youngest one could speak English” and that Adele told her story “through her young interpreter.”

6. Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 3, read in the text layer of the published PDF and checked against a 130 dpi rendering of the page. The internal quotation is the decree's; the expert is not named in the decree, and the underlying expert reports were not reached (Appendix A).
7. *History of Northern Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881), Brown County biographical sketches, sketch of Silas L. Doyne. Read 2026-07-25 in the Internet Archive optical-character-recognition text (identifier `wi-northern-wi-1881-western-historical-co`). The search was literal, case-insensitive, and confined to one line at a time in that exact text; it cannot exclude a hyphenated form, an unindexed variant spelling, damaged recognition, or a passage the scanner mangled. The single hit was read in context in that text; the corresponding page images were not checked, and the sketch is reported here only for what it excludes, not for what it asserts about the Presbyterian school.
8. Peter Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There! or, Thrilling Episode of a Strange Event Related by an Eye-Witness* (Montreal: printed by John Lovell, 1874), Appendix, at printed p. 95. Read 2026-07-25 in the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions scan on the Internet Archive (identifier `cihm_04805`), and collated throughout against the French original of the same year, *Le doigt de Dieu est là!* (Montreal: Eusèbe Sénécal, 1874; identifier `cihm_23982`), which reads at the corresponding place “Il y a 10 ou 12 ans, cette colonie Belge n'avait point de prêtre résidant au milieu d'elle.”
9. Diocese of Green Bay, “Past Bishops,” <https://www.gbdioc.org/about-us/past-bishops/>, read 2026-07-25: the diocese was established in 1868, and the listed succession from Joseph Melcher (1868–1873) to David Ricken (2008–) makes Ricken the twelfth bishop, as his own decree states. The jurisdiction competent over the site in 1859 was not verified by this study.
10. National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, “Shrine Historical Timeline,” <https://championshrine.org/timeline/>, read 2026-07-25. Custodial statements; no diocesan, land, or school record was consulted for any of them.
11. Eliza Allen Starr, *Patron Saints* (Baltimore: John B. Piet & Co., 1883). The copy read is the New York Public Library copy digitized by the Internet Archive, identifier `patron saints00star`, read 2026-07-25. Front matter checked at 150 dpi page images: the imprimatur is printed in the Latin form “MARTINUS JOANNES, ARCHIEPISCOPUS BALTIMORENSIS,” and the copyright line reads “Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by ELIZA ALLEN STARR, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.” The dedication is dated “St. Joseph's Cottage, Chicago. Feast of All Saints, MDCCCLXIX.” The chapter “St. Lioba” begins at printed p. 295 in the volume's contents; the Adele Brise passage runs from p. 297 to p. 301.
12. Starr, *Patron Saints*, pp. 297–298 for the quoted framing sentences. The chapter closes by returning to Lioba as “the patron of teachers.”
13. Starr, *Patron Saints*, pp. 298–301. The ellipsis marks the omission of an intervening paragraph on Adele's free school, the growth in numbers, and the Chicago begging journey, which is described in the body text above. Public domain: the volume was copyright-entered in 1871 and printed in 1883, and Starr died in 1901. The 1896 Chicago printing of the first series (identifier `PatronSaints1st2ndSeries`) reproduces this passage from the same plates, at the same page numbers, with no substantive variant located; its own copyright line reads 1881 and its imprimatur is in the name of the Archbishop of Chicago. The two witnesses were compared line by line in their optical-character-recognition texts, and the 1883 text was read against 150 dpi page images at the passage quoted.
14. Starr, *Patron Saints*, pp. 300–301. Starr also records that the two women wore “black serge gowns and cloaks” and cape-bonnets of black barège, that she at first took them for “‘Sisters,’ of some Order unknown to me,” and that they carried “a letter in choice French, from Rev. Father P. — of Robinsonville, near Green Bay, in Wisconsin.” The priest is not named beyond the initial.
15. Peter Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There! or, Thrilling Episode of a Strange Event Related by an Eye-Witness* (Montreal: printed by John Lovell, St. Nicholas Street, 1874), title page and Appendix, printed pp. 94–102. The French original of the same year is *Le doigt de Dieu est là! ou Épisode émouvant d'un évènement étrange raconté par un témoin oculaire* (Montreal: Eusèbe Sénécal, imprimeur, 1874), Appendice, printed pp. 91–101. Both were read 2026-07-25 in Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions scans on the Internet Archive, identifiers `cihm_04805` (English) and `cihm_23982` (French). Both title pages carry the same two statements: publication “with the approbation of His Lordship the Bishop of Montreal” and publication “for the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, in Marinette, State of Wisconsin.” The English volume prints the approbation in full: the bishop has read the work, has “been deeply touched by it,” and recommends that the faithful of his diocese keep a copy at home “so as to read and re-read it frequently in the family circle.” The approbation commends the book; it makes no judgment about the Robinsonville events.
16. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, pp. 95 and 101–102; French, pp. 92 and 100–101 (“qui est le seul encore, je crois, aux États-Unis”).
17. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, pp. 95–97; French, pp. 92–95. Public domain: printed 1874, author died 1909. Printed pp. 95 and 98–100 were read at 200 dpi from the scan's page images and the quotations here were collated against them; the seer's name is set with a grave accent in the 1874 printing (“Adèle Brisse”), and the acute of the optical-character-recognition text is a scanner artifact. Elsewhere the recognition text has been corrected only where the

scanner plainly misread a letter within a word; no wording has been supplied, normalized, or harmonized with the French. The French reads at the corresponding place: “*Bonne mère, que vouléz-vous de moi. — Je veux, lui répondit la Dame, que tu instruis mes enfants. Tu viens de recevoir mon fils, et tu as bien fait, mais ces pauvres enfants le reçoivent sans savoir ce qu’ils font, et grandissent dans l’ignorance de la Religion. Je veux que tu les instruises et surtout, que tu les prépares à leur première communion. — Comment ferai-je cela, bonne mère, je ne suis qu’une pauvre ignorante moi-même? — Va, et ne crains rien; je t’aiderai.*” The two texts agree substantively throughout the appendix; the divergences located are noted in the body above and in Appendix A.

18. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, pp. 97–99; French, pp. 95–97; printed pp. 98–99 read at 200 dpi. The French has “l’arbre sur lequel s’est faite l’apparition” where the English has “the tree sanctified by her apparent touch,” and “six arpents” where the English has “about six acres.” The English printing has a compositor’s error at this point, “twice very year” for “twice every year”; the French reads “*chaque année, à deux époques fixes.*” Pernin does not name the two dates.
19. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, p. 93; French, p. 90. The passage closes his memoir proper, immediately before the Appendix, with Psalm 2 (Vulgate numbering as he cites it): “And now, O ye kings, understand: receive instruction you that judge the earth.”
20. “Our Story,” <https://championshrine.org/our-story/>, read 2026-07-25. The shrine’s separate historical timeline, <https://championshrine.org/timeline/>, read the same day, supplies the dated frame used in the table below: birth at Dion-le-Val, Belgium, 30 January 1831; a land purchase by Lambert and Marie Brice in the town of Red River on 7 August 1855; the apparitions on 9 October 1859; a second chapel in 1861 and the beginning of pilgrimages; a Third Order Franciscan community, school, and convent in 1864; the fire of 8 October 1871; Adele’s death on 5 July 1896. These are custodial statements, not records this study verified.
21. “Shrine Historical Timeline,” read 2026-07-25, entry for 1871: “Pilgrimages increase and devotions on the 15th of August begin.” Compare Starr, *Patron Saints*, p. 301. This study does not attempt to date the origin of the August observance; it records that the earliest witness located presents it as already annual.
22. “Our Story” and “Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion,” both read 2026-07-25. The October pairing is explicit on the solemnity page, which sets the vigil of 8 October against the solemnity of 9 October.
23. Frank Tilton, *Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin at Peshtigo, the Sugar Bush, Menekaune, Williamsonville, and Generally on the Shores of Green Bay, with Thrilling and Truthful Incidents by Eye Witnesses. Also, a Statement of Relief Funds Contributed* (Green Bay: Robinson & Kustermann, Publishers, 1871), Preface. **Artifact caution:** the copy read is not the 1871 imprint. It is a modern reset reproduction, digitized and uploaded to the Internet Archive in 2022 under the identifier `sketch-of-the-great-fires-in-wisconsin`, which reproduces the 1871 title page typographically and includes the folded “Map of the Burnt District of Wisconsin 1871” as a plate. Pages cited were read at 150 dpi. Nothing in this study depends on a reading that a reset edition could not preserve, and the one place where the reset text is demonstrably corrupt is flagged below.
24. Tilton, *Sketch of the Great Fires*, ch. XIV; Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, p. 94; French, p. 91 (“à 9 ou 10 lieues loin de moi; et cette distance qui nous sépare est formée par les eaux de la Baie Verte”). The reset Tilton text at this point reads “On the night of October 3d, at about the same hour of the disaster on the west shore of Green Bay” — a date that contradicts the same volume’s own preface, its map, and every other witness. The reading was checked against the page image and is what the reset edition prints; whether the error is the 1871 compositor’s or the modern setter’s cannot be determined from this artifact. This study treats the east-shore firestorm as belonging to the night of 8 October 1871 on the strength of the preface, the map, and Pernin.
25. Tilton, *Sketch of the Great Fires*, ch. XIV, read at 150 dpi. “Robinsonville” also appears on the volume’s map of the burnt district, on the east shore of Green Bay within the shaded area. The Door County casualty and building figures Tilton gives in the same paragraph (117 of about 130 deaths; two mills, one church, six schoolhouses, 148 dwellings burned) are county figures and do not cover Robinsonville, which is in Brown County.
26. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, pp. 99–101; French, pp. 97–99. The English scan’s optical-character recognition is badly damaged through the sentence beginning “If the Blessed Virgin still has need of us” and again at the close of the passage; both were therefore read directly at 200 dpi from the page images of printed pp. 99–100, which carry the wording given here. The French reads at the first place “*Si la Ste. Vierge a besoin encore de nous, elle saura nous protéger, si non, elle nous laissera brûler avec les autres,*” a slightly blunter formulation than the English. The French for the last sentence reads: “*Cette place comme sanctifiée par l’attouchement de la Mère de Dieu, apparaissait semblable à une île verdoyante au milieu d’une mer de cendres.*”
27. Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There!*, p. 101; French, pp. 99–100 (“*Réflexion importante*”). Pernin’s parallel refusal about his own tabernacle at Peshtigo is in the same sentence in both languages.
28. “Our Story,” <https://championshrine.org/our-story/>, read 2026-07-25, under the heading “The Fire,” attributed on the page to “Fr. Peter Pernin.”

29. Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 2. The recital adopts the fuller narration — “many of the faithful” rather than Adele’s small community. It stands among the GIVEN THAT recitals, not in the THEREFORE clause.
30. Decree of 8 December 2010, pp. 1–2.
31. “Our Story,” <https://championshrine.org/our-story/>, read 2026-07-25, under the heading “The Declaration.” This is a custodial statement. The diocesan instrument constituting the commission, if published, was not located; see Appendix A.
32. Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 3.
33. CDF, *Norms* (25 February 1978), Preliminary Note, a)–c).
34. CDF, *Norms* (25 February 1978), I.B, a)–e). The Norms add at the end of I that “these criteria, be they positive or negative, are not peremptory but rather indicative, and they should be applied cumulatively or with some mutual convergence.”
35. Decree of 8 December 2010, pp. 1–2, read in the text layer and checked against a 130 dpi rendering of p. 1. The ellipses are the decree’s own. The decree introduces the quotation by saying that the Lady “gave her a two-fold mission of prayer for the conversion of sinners and catechesis.”
36. DDF, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena* (17 May 2024), presentation by Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, English text read 2026-07-25 at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_ddf_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html. The examples the presentation gives are a letter to the Bishop of Gap of 3 August 2007 and a *congresso* of 11 May 2001 concerning the Bishop of Gikongoro.
37. Decree of 8 December 2010, p. 4.
38. Diocese of Green Bay, “Past Bishops,” <https://www.gbdioc.org/about-us/past-bishops/>, read 2026-07-25.
39. CDF, *Norms* (25 February 1978), II.2. The caution attaches there to the intermediate permission of cult rather than to a final judgment of authenticity, but the underlying principle — that ecclesiastical permission and supernatural certification are different things — governs the whole instrument.
40. *Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), cann. 1230–1231, English text read 2026-07-25 at https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann1205-1243_en.html. Can. 1232 assigns approval of a national shrine’s statutes to the conference of bishops; can. 1234 §1 requires that at shrines the means of salvation be supplied more abundantly through preaching, liturgy — especially Eucharist and penance — and approved forms of popular piety.
41. National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, “Shrine Historical Timeline,” <https://championshrine.org/timeline/>, and “Our Story,” <https://championshrine.org/our-story/>, both read 2026-07-25. The conference’s own act was not reached: the USCCB pages on national shrines returned HTTP 403 to every retrieval attempt made in this study, and no alternative official publication of the designation was located (Appendix A).
42. National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, “Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion,” <https://championshrine.org/loc-solemnity/>, read 2026-07-25; the inaugural solemnity of 9 October 2023 is recorded on the same page and in the shrine’s timeline. Neither the diocesan decree nor any rescript or indult of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was located, and this study does not state the instrument, its date, its form, or its exact grant (Appendix A). The shrine’s page also describes 9 October as “the established anniversary day of the Blessed Virgin Mary’s 2nd and 3rd apparitions.”
43. “Our Story,” read 2026-07-25, under “The Mission.” This study did not inspect the inscription or any photograph of it.
44. The title is used on the shrine’s own pages, for example “Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion,” read 2026-07-25 (“Servant of God Adele Brice”), and a dedicated site, <https://adelebrice.org/adele-brice-path-to-sainthood/>, presents the cause. The dated acts of the cause — the *nihil obstat* of the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, the diocesan edict, the opening of the diocesan inquiry — were not reached in a form this study could cite, and no date is asserted here (Appendix A).
45. DDF, *Norms* (17 May 2024), I, n. 13, which supports the principle from the 1932 canonization decree of St. Gemma Galgani: Pius XI dwelt on the heroic virtues of “this innocent as well as penitent girl,” *nullo tamen per praesens decretum (quod quidem numquam fieri solet) prolato iudicio de praeternaturalibus Servae Dei charismatibus* — “without, however, by the present decree (which, of course, is never usually done) passing judgment on the supernatural charisms of the Servant of God.” The Norms’ own English rendering is quoted.
46. DDF, *Norms* (17 May 2024), II, art. 27, and the closing note recording the Holy Father’s approval on 4 May 2024, deliberation in ordinary session on 17 April 2024, and entry into effect.
47. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium* (21 November 1964), n. 60, English text read 2026-07-25 at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

48. *Lumen gentium*, n. 62. The Council adds that “no creature could ever be counted as equal with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer,” and that the Church professes “this subordinate role of Mary” so that the faithful “may the more intimately adhere to the Mediator and Redeemer.”
49. Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (30 September 2010), n. 14, as quoted at note 24 of the DDF *Norms* of 17 May 2024.

A Scope, Status, and Qualifications

Question and thesis boundary

This study answers one question: what can be established, from sources this study actually read, about the events reported at Robinsonville (now Champion), Wisconsin, in or about October 1859; how the two earliest published narratives relate to each other and to the narrative now received; what the record of the night of 8 October 1871 supports; what exactly Bishop David L. Ricken judged on 8 December 2010, in which words and with what object; and what that judgment obliges and leaves open. It is a source-audited study instrument: not a devotional narrative, a shrine history, a critical edition, a magisterial act, a canonical opinion, a position paper in the cause of Adele Brise, or a history of the Wisconsin fires of 1871. It proposes no judgment of its own on supernaturality and does not second-guess the competent authority’s act.

Corpus and exclusions

Included: the reported October 1859 events at the strata named in §§3–5; Eliza Allen Starr’s account, read in the 1883 Baltimore reissue of the volume copyright-entered in 1871 and collated against the 1896 Chicago printing of the first series; Peter Pernin’s account, read in both the English and the French printings of 1874; the current custodial narrative published by the National Shrine; Frank Tilton’s 1871 compilation on the fires, read in a modern reset reproduction; the 1881 *History of Northern Wisconsin* as a negative-search corpus only; the signed four-page decree of 8 December 2010; the CDF Norms of 25 February 1978 and the DDF Norms of 17 May 2024; cann. 1230–1234 of the 1983 Code; *Lumen gentium* 60–62; and the shrine’s own statements about the national-shrine designation, the 2023 change of title and solemnity, and the cause of Adele Brise.

Excluded or bounded: any reconstruction of a Walloon or French original of the reported words; any determination of the day of the month or the number of appearances; any assertion about the mechanism of perception; any authentication of a healing, favour, crutch, relic, or pilgrimage story; any adjudication of casualty totals, acreage, fire mechanics, or meteorology in 1871; any claim that the 1859 message foretold the 1871 fires; any superlative about American apparition sites; and every claim of the “all approved apparitions” type — this is a single-event study and asserts no registry.

Geography, chronology, and currentness

Subject geography: Robinsonville / Champion and the Belgian settlements of Brown, Kewaunee, and Door counties, Wisconsin; Green Bay; Peshtigo and Marinette; Chicago and Montreal as places of publication. Subject range: 1859 to the acts current at the as-of date. As-of date: all mutable claims — current controlling status, the shrine’s pages, the Vatican texts of the 1978 and 2024 Norms and of *Lumen gentium*, the diocesan list of bishops — were checked on 2026-07-25. No act of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith concerning Champion, before or after 2010, was located, and no inference of unchanged status is drawn from that silence beyond the bounded statement that nothing was found. Stable historical facts are not given artificial currentness. Negative results are bounded searches, correctable by better evidence.

Taxonomy and terminology

Kept distinct throughout: *reported events* (everything attributed to the apparition, whose default register is “reported”); *period published narrative* (Starr 1871; Pernin 1874); *contemporary compilation* (Tilton 1871); *received custodial narrative* (the shrine’s current pages and timeline); *competent judgment* (the 2010 decree); *procedural law* (the 1978 and 2024 Norms; the 1983 Code); *institutional or liturgical reception* (national-shrine title, solemnity, change of

devotional title); *cause of canonization* (a separate proceeding with a separate object); and *project synthesis* (this study’s own judgments, which appear only inside blocks labelled “Project synthesis”). “Do exhibit the substance of supernatural character” is the 2010 act’s own formula and is deliberately not translated into the 2024 taxonomy. “Servant of God” means that a cause has been introduced, nothing more.

Source hierarchy and method

Priority: the exact operative and documentary texts in identified witnesses (the decree in its signed four-page PDF, its operative page read as an image because that page carries no text layer; the Vatican texts of the Norms, the Code, and *Lumen gentium*); then the nineteenth-century published narratives, read in digitized scans with the passages quoted checked against page images where the reading is consequential, and with the English and French Pernin printings collated against each other; then the contemporary fire compilation, at the reduced ceiling its modern reset transmission imposes; then the shrine’s institutional pages, always at institutional-self-description ceilings. Optical-character-recognition text was used for searching and reading; where it is damaged, the damage is stated and the wording is taken from the page images rather than supplied by conjecture.

Qualifications and unresolved items

(1) No 1859–1870 source of any kind was located; the event stratum rests entirely on retrospective narrative. (2) The 1871 first-series imprint of Starr’s *Patron Saints* was not located; the text was read in the 1883 Baltimore reissue, whose copyright entry is 1871, and collated against the 1896 Chicago printing. Whether the Adele passage was composed before or after the fire of 8 October 1871 cannot be determined from the volume, and no argument here depends on it. (3) Pernin’s implied date, “ten or twelve years” before 1874, is incompatible with October 1859 and is left unreconciled. (4) Tilton’s *Sketch* was read in a modern reset reproduction, not the 1871 Green Bay imprint; that copy prints “October 3d” for the east-shore firestorm, contradicting its own preface and map, and the error cannot be assigned to a compositor. (5) The 1881 *History of Northern Wisconsin* was searched literally, line by line, in optical-character-recognition text; the negative result cannot exclude variant spellings, hyphenation, or damaged recognition. (6) The source of the paragraph attributed to “Fr. Peter Pernin” on the shrine’s site was not identified; the finding is only that it is not the 1874 text in either language. (7) Sister M. Dominica’s shrine history of 1955, the archives of the Diocese of Green Bay and of the National Shrine, nineteenth-century Green Bay newspaper files, parish registers, and the reports of the three Marian experts were not reached; no clause in this study depends on them. (8) The diocesan original of the 2010 decree, its protocol number, and any register entry were not consulted; the instrument constituting the 2009 commission was not located. (9) Whether the Holy See authorized or reviewed the 2010 decree cannot be determined, for the reason given in §7.5; neither involvement nor its absence is asserted. (10) The USCCB act designating the national shrine was not reached (the conference’s pages returned HTTP 403); the date of 19 March 2016 is the shrine’s. (11) The diocesan decree and any Roman instrument behind the 2023 change of title and the annual solemnity were not reached; only the shrine’s description is reported. (12) The dated acts of the cause of Adele Brise were not reached and no date is asserted. (13) Biographical dates for Adele Brise are the shrine’s custodial statements. (14) The jurisdiction competent over the site in 1859 was not verified and is not named. (15) No independent Mariological, historical, canonical, archival, liturgical, Walloon-language, wildfire-history, meteorological, or Belgian-American review has occurred; no ecclesiastical review or approval is claimed or implied, and no catalogue entry may claim any.

Rights

Project prose is original and intended for CC BY 4.0. Quotations remain under their own status. Starr’s *Patron Saints* (copyright-entered 1871; author died 1901) and Pernin’s *The Finger of God Is There!* and *Le doigt de Dieu est là!* (both 1874; author died 1909) are public domain in the United States and are quoted with citation; the digitized scans consulted are third-party artifacts and are not redistributed. Tilton’s *Sketch* (1871) is public domain in text; the modern reset reproduction consulted is a third-party artifact, quoted briefly with citation. The 2010 decree is an ecclesiastical act of the Diocese of Green Bay, published by the National Shrine; its rights status was not resolved, and it is quoted only so far as identifying its object and effect requires. Holy See texts — *Lumen gentium*, the 1978 and 2024 Norms, the 1983 Code — are quoted within ordinary scholarly limits with citation. National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion and Diocese of Green Bay web pages are © their publishers and are quoted briefly with citation. Online

availability is not treated as a reuse licence; no complete document is reproduced; and no prayer text is printed here for recitation.

B References

Witnesses are listed with role and rights notes; the access date for all web loci is 2026-07-25 unless stated otherwise. Stable source identities for the starred entries are registered in the repository source library; this publication's bindings are in `research/source-bindings.toml`.

The controlling act and the procedural law

- *David L. Ricken, Bishop of Green Bay, *Decree on the Authenticity of the Apparitions of 1859 at the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help, Diocese of Green Bay*, 8 December 2010, four pages. Role: the operative approval act, quoted at its operative clause in §1 and analyzed in §7. Witness: the signed PDF published by the National Shrine, <https://championshrine.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Shrine-of-Our-Lady-of-Good-Help-Declaration.pdf> (SHA-256 of the file as retrieved `b10ad96f0821fef8072164d6f83d3f33d9e008e1aa510d1c5706bbe53bbd664e`; pp. 1–3 have a text layer, p. 4 is an image and was read at 150 dpi). Rights status unresolved; quoted only so far as identifying the act's object and effect requires.
- *Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms regarding the manner of proceeding in the discernment of presumed apparitions or revelations*, 25 February 1978. Role: the procedural regime in force when the 2010 decree issued; its positive criteria and three-step path are collated with the decree in §7.2. Witness: the Holy See's English text, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19780225_norme-apparizioni_en.html.
- *Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Norms for Proceeding in the Discernment of Alleged Supernatural Phenomena*, 17 May 2024, with the Prefect's presentation. Role: current procedural law; the six conclusions, nn. 11–13 and 23, arts. 1–2, 22 and 27, and the presentation's account of pre-2024 practice, used in §§7–8. Witness: the Holy See's English text, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_d_df_doc_20240517_norme-fenomeni-soprannaturali_en.html.
- **Codex Iuris Canonici* (1983), cann. 1230–1234. Role: the legal category of shrine and national shrine, used in §8.1. Witness: the Holy See's English text, https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib4-cann1205-1243_en.html.
- *Second Vatican Council, *Lumen gentium*, 21 November 1964, nn. 60–62. Role: the doctrinal boundary within which the reported message is read in §9.4. Witness: the Holy See's English text, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html.

The nineteenth-century published narratives

- *Eliza Allen Starr, *Patron Saints* (Baltimore: John B. Piet & Co., 1883), chapter “St. Lioba,” pp. 297–301; copyright entered 1871. Role: the earliest published narrative of the events located by this study; quoted at length in §3 and used as the base text of the stratigraphy in §5. Witness: the Internet Archive scan of the New York Public Library copy, <https://archive.org/details/patronsaints00star> (optical-character-recognition text for reading and searching; front matter and pp. 298–301 read at 150 dpi). Collated against the Chicago 1896 printing of the first series, <https://archive.org/details/PatronSaints1st2ndSeries>, which reproduces the same setting at the same page numbers. Public domain (author died 1901).
- *Peter Pernin, *The Finger of God Is There! or, Thrilling Episode of a Strange Event Related by an Eye-Witness* (Montreal: printed by John Lovell, 1874), Appendix, pp. 94–102. Role: the second earliest published narrative and the sole early witness to the preservation of 8 October 1871; quoted in §§4 and 6. Witness: the Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions scan, https://archive.org/details/cihm_04805 (recognition text for reading and searching; printed pp. 95 and 98–100 read at 200 dpi and collated against the quotations). Public domain (author died 1909). Published with the approbation of the Bishop of Montreal and for the benefit of a church at Marinette, Wisconsin; used at the ceiling of a devotional fundraising narrative that declares its own abridgement.

- *Peter Pernin, *Le doigt de Dieu est là! ou Épisode émouvant d'un évènement étrange raconté par un témoin oculaire* (Montreal: Eusèbe Sénécal, 1874), Appendice, pp. 91–101. Role: textual control on the English printing; collated clause by clause in §§4 and 6. Witness: https://archive.org/details/cihm_23982. Public domain.

The 1871 fires

- *Frank Tilton, *Sketch of the Great Fires in Wisconsin at Peshtigo, the Sugar Bush, Menekaune, Williamsonville, and Generally on the Shores of Green Bay* (Green Bay: Robinson & Kustermann, 1871), Preface and ch. XIV, with the *Map of the Burnt District of Wisconsin 1871*. Role: the contemporary compilation against which the Champion preservation tradition is tested in §6.1; it names Robinsonville among the settlements destroyed and records no exception there. Witness: a modern reset reproduction digitized on the Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/sketch-of-the-great-fires-in-wisconsin>, read at 150 dpi; the 1871 imprint was not reached, and that copy prints “October 3d” where the volume’s own preface and map give 8 October 1871. Public domain in text.
- *History of Northern Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1881). Role: negative-search corpus only, for the absence of any mention of Adele Brice or the chapel; the single occurrence of “Robinsonville” is in an unrelated biographical sketch. Witness: the Internet Archive optical-character-recognition text, <https://archive.org/details/wi-northern-wi-1881-western-historical-co>. Public domain. Searched literally and line by line; the limits of that search are stated in §2.3 and Appendix A.

Custodial and diocesan presentations

- *National Shrine of Our Lady of Champion, “Our Story” (<https://championshrine.org/our-story/>), “Shrine Historical Timeline” (<https://championshrine.org/timeline/>), and “Solemnity of Our Lady of Champion” (<https://championshrine.org/oloc-solemnity/>), all read 2026-07-25. Role: the current custodial narrative of the events, the fire, the dated frame, the national-shrine designation, the 2023 change of title and solemnity, and the paragraph attributed to Pernin that §6.3 shows is not his text. Used at institutional-self-description ceilings throughout. © the publisher; quoted briefly with citation.
- Diocese of Green Bay, “Past Bishops” (<https://www.gbdioc.org/about-us/past-bishops/>), read 2026-07-25. Role: the establishment of the diocese in 1868 and the succession making Bishop Ricken the twelfth. © the publisher.
- <https://adelebrice.org/adele-brice-path-to-sainthood/>, read 2026-07-25. Role: the existence and presentation of the cause of canonization; it supplied no dated act, and none is asserted. © the publisher.

Not reached

Listed here because their absence bounds this study: Sister M. Dominica, *The Chapel: Our Lady of Good Help* (1955); the archives of the Diocese of Green Bay and of the National Shrine; nineteenth-century Green Bay newspaper files; the sacramental registers of the parish Adele walked to; the 1871 Green Bay imprint of Tilton; the 1871 first-series imprint of Starr; the reports of the three Marian experts named in the 2010 decree; the diocesan original of that decree; the act of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops designating the national shrine; and the diocesan and Roman instruments behind the 2023 change of title and annual solemnity.

Last revised (UTC): 2026-09-24T14:59:29Z

Reuse and rights. To the extent Triptych holds the rights, project-created content and design are licensed under CC BY 4.0. Scripture, liturgical or official texts, received prayers or hymns, quotations, fonts, and other third-party material retain their own status; public-domain material remains public domain. Identify changes. Attribution implies neither Triptych nor ecclesiastical approval. See LICENSE and THIRD_PARTY.md in the source.