

St. Elizabeth of Hungary feast day

Nov. 17

Catholics and Protestants in Germany and other European countries celebrate 2007 as "The Year of St. Elizabeth of Hungary." Numerous programs, Masses, pilgrimages, talks, presentations, conferences, exhibits, even a musical, have already taken place there, with the culmination in November when the feast day of St. Elizabeth will be celebrated Nov. 17.

Maryland is blessed with two churches dedicated to the beloved saint: St. Elizabeth of Hungary church in Highlandtown and St. Elizabeth of Hungary church in Denton, on the Eastern Shore.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary parish in Highlandtown was established in 1895 for the many 19th- century German immigrants and others in the area. The church itself is a beautiful and substantial building. The parish maintains a school, Pre-K to eighth grade.

There are more than 80 churches named after St. Elizabeth of Hungary in the United States. They can be found in 30 states.

The founders were European immigrants of the 19th century: Irish railroad workers and canal builders, German farmers and artisans, Hungarian miners, Slovak workers, French settlers and possibly other nationalities.

The U.S. St. Elizabeth of Hungary churches were built in a variety of styles: at first little log chapels and small white frame buildings, then soaring red brick churches and massive stone edifices. Some had colorful stained glass windows, others show painted decorations.

Building lots for the churches were often donated by parishioners; money for materials, pews, altars, statues and other furnishings came from the immigrants and their descendants. The Catholic church in their midst reminded them of the close-knit communities they had left behind in Europe.

St. Elizabeth, a Hungarian princess of royal descent, was born in the year 1207. At

the age of 4, the little girl was sent far away from home to the land of Thuringia in Germany to be raised with and later married to Landgrave Ludwig IV at Wartburg Castle.

Despite being a politically arranged marriage, the young couple was happy. Elizabeth was only 14 at the time. She bore 3 children, the last one when her husband went on a crusade and died before reaching the Holy Land.

After his death she moved from the castle to a mud hut in Marburg where she founded a hospital for the sick and impoverished. She gave all her earthly possessions to the poor, took care of the invalids, and mortified her body severely. She arranged to have her own children raised and educated by others, so she could concentrate on her mission and help the poor. Either from exhaustion or an illness she died Nov.17, 1231. Four years later she was canonized.

The magnificent Gothic St. Elizabeth church in Marburg was erected during the same century. Many of the pilgrimages and other events in honor of St. Elizabeth take place at this church during the year. It now belongs to the Protestant Confession, but both Protestants and Catholics pray there.

Due to demographic changes, diminishing congregations and other factors, some Catholic St. Elizabeth churches have been closed or disappeared. Nevertheless, over more than 150 years, St. Elizabeth of Hungary has been the patroness of churches, hospitals, schools, colleges, orders and caritative institutions in the United States.

May the faithful continue to experience her protection and mercy.