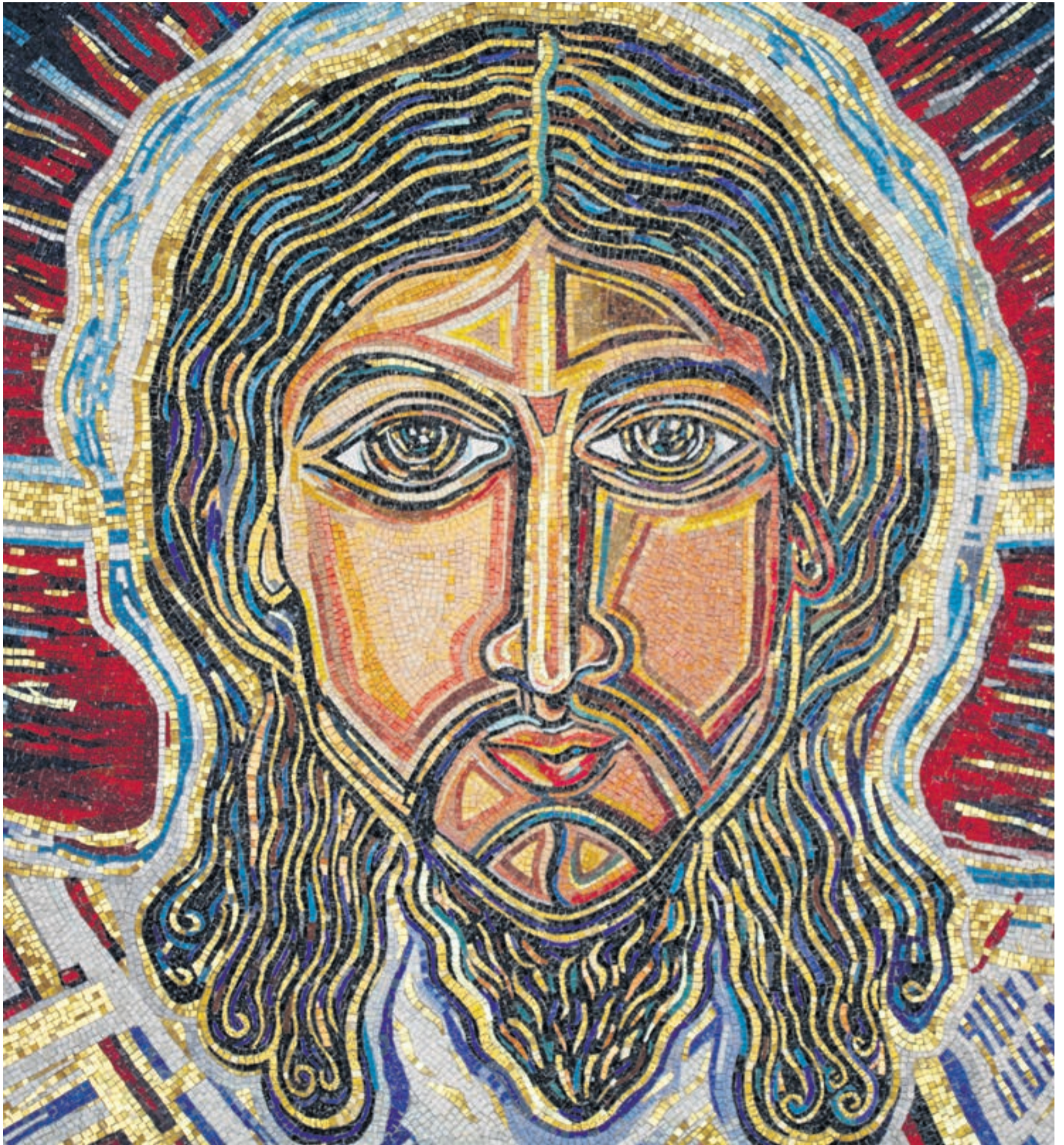


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art for a community

a creative monastic project
in Cape Cod

clean-air act

Paul Kerensa's holy jokes

PLUS: folk-singers without knowing it

The pictures tell the story

The vision cherished by two American laywomen was realised in a feast of religious imagery housed in the Church of the Transfiguration, in Cape Cod. *Kitty Teague reports*

NESTLED in the small town of Rock Harbor, in Cape Cod Bay, Massachusetts, lies a rare jewel. The richly decorated Church of the Transfiguration, adorned with contemporary artwork, is the home of the Community of Jesus.

The buildings and the community are the realisation of a dream of two Episcopal laywomen, Cay Andersen and Judy Sorensen. The two met at the Episcopal Church of the Holy Spirit, Orleans, Massachusetts, in June 1958, and quickly became friends.

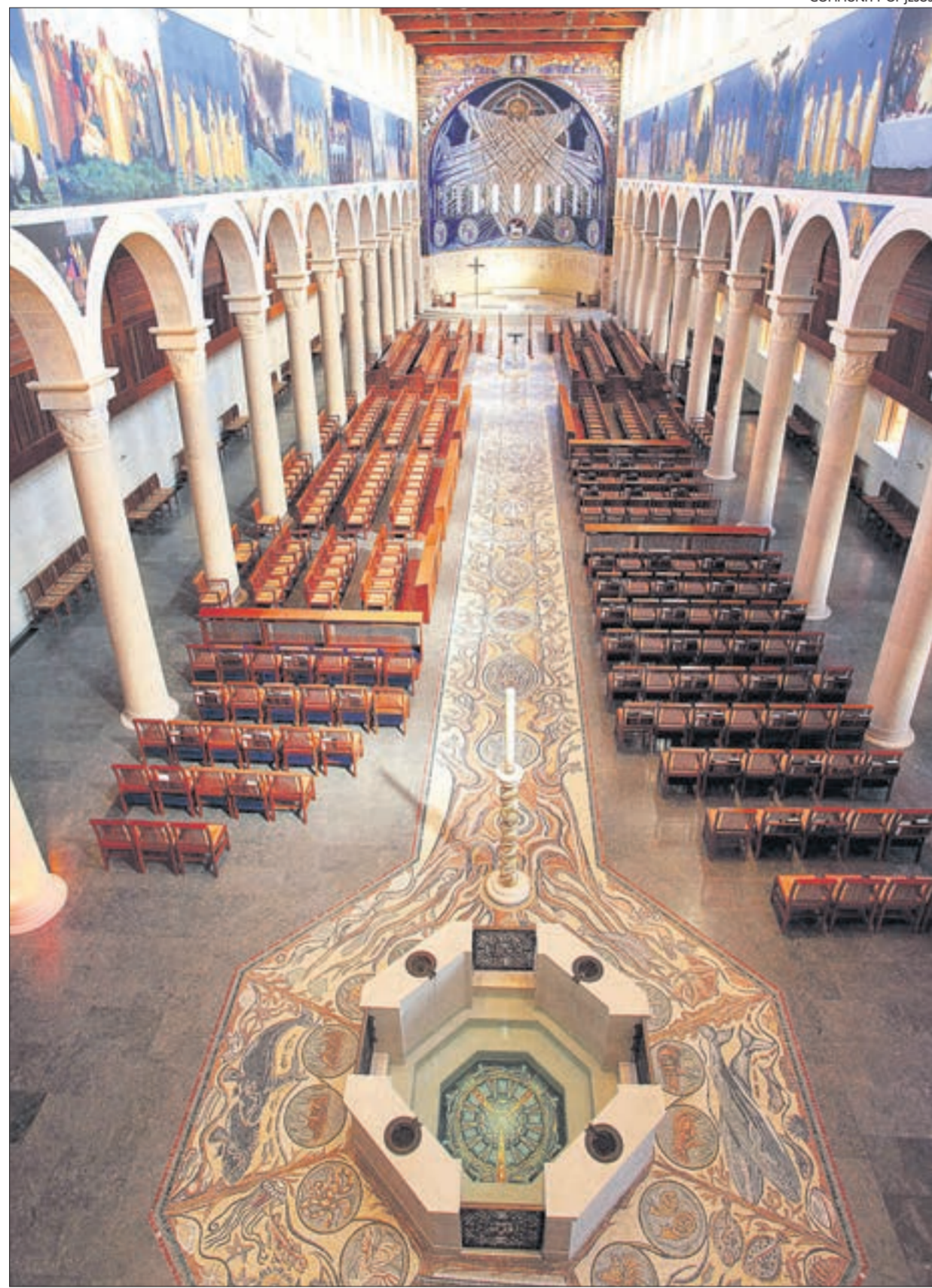
After initiating a prayer-and-Bible-study group in Mrs Sorensen's home on Crystal Lake, New Jersey, the women began to reach out to larger audiences, who were inspired by their practical application of biblical teachings to everyday life.

When the women and their families decided to share a home in 1961, however, they began to appreciate the benefits of community life. By the following year, they had gathered a significant following of women who shared their enthusiasm.

By now, they had defined several principles: emphasising the importance of preferring others to oneself; striving together for a common purpose; and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit in making joint decisions. The Community of Jesus was conceived.

It continued to grow, and, by 1969, the homes of the earliest members had been converted into buildings for church use; other houses near by were bought, and the foundations of the community were established. Through the '70s and '80s, the community life evolved into an ecumenical monastic order in the Benedictine tradition, and the community adopted a formal Rule of Life in 2003.

NOW, more than half of the lay members live in housing surrounding the church building. There are also 25 Brothers living in the Zion Friary, and 60 Sisters in Bethany Convent. Worship and daily



COMMUNITY OF JESUS

Building community: above: the interior of the church, showing the mosaic aisle; right: the atrium at night, with the bronze reliefs of Adam and Eve on the west doors

'The spirit of creativity can carry the message of the gospel'



ROBERT BENSON

life remain distinctly Episcopalian, but Benedictine.

The earliest buildings of the community — one of them a working bed and breakfast — were the homes of the founders and its first members. But, as the community and the number of visitors grew, expansion became necessary. After Andersen's unexpected death in 1988, and Sorensen's retirement in 1992, the community elected a prioress, Mother Betty Pugsley, who still leads the community.

It was she who drew together earlier plans and ideas for a new church to replace the first chapel (a converted pump-house). She formed a planning committee to collaborate with architects and lawyers in coming up with a suitable design. William Rawn Associates, Architects, of Boston, was commissioned with the design for the community buildings and the

church itself, the construction of which began on All Saints' Day 1997. By 2000, the basilica-style church, built from Minnesota limestone, was complete.

The most striking feature of the Church of the Transfiguration is its commitment to the use of contemporary art and craft, displayed in a recently published and richly illustrated book. Anderson and Sorensen believed that the images in the church should bear faithful adherence to scriptures, and should, throughout the community buildings, tell the story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

Sister Mercy, who works in the marketing department of the community, says: "We believe that beauty, visualised in the arts, can be an expression of the nature of God himself. The spirit of creativity released through the arts can carry the message of the gospel in a powerful way, beyond just words."

The community commissioned artists from around the world, the quality of whose work would not be out of place in a major cathedral.

The eloquent narrative begins with the church entrance. Carved into the outside of the high bronze doors, which were constructed by the sculptor Romolo Del Deo, is the image of Adam and Eve with the Tree of Life — the tree is a recurring theme — welcoming all who enter.

INSIDE, a processional pathway in mosaic, constructed by Alessandra Caprara and painted by Helen McLean, runs the length of the nave, and connects the font and the altar. The first image is a seed and the roots of the Tree of Life. Then, stories from the Bible flow in chronological order; Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the life of Moses, and the life of Elijah.

Towards the end of the pathway, near the altar, are four images that portray the values central to community life. An image of a bee and a beehive, depicting the organised ac-



COMMUNITY OF JESUS



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Resonant symbols: left: Christ in glory, on the wall of the apse; above: the mosaic bee and hive are emblems of community



COMMUNITY OF JESUS

Earth and heaven: above: the glass Transfiguration wall, and oculus window; right: the Tree of Life is a recurring theme

