

The Shrine of Saint Joseph's Friends, Inc. NEWSLETTER

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WINTER – SPRING ISSUE 2026

Artisans Continue the Reverent Renewal of the Shrine

In the hushed hours before the Shrine doors open to the faithful, a different kind of liturgy has occurred periodically for more than 40 years. It has been the work of three generations of artisans—painters, conservators, and craftsmen—who have offered their specialized talents and quiet devotion to preserving the beauty and history of this 182-year-old Catholic landmark.

In the early 1980s, Ted Wofford, the renowned architect who led the restoration of the Shrine, brought on Tom Sater's Artisan Decorators, specialists in Victorian restoration. This highly skilled team is credited with carefully restoring each surface of the Shrine church and rectory back to its original splendor. John Picco and Ed Benson, who had learned their craft at Artisan Decorators, followed in the 1990s by starting their own company, Picco and Benson. For more than 25 years, they tended to the Shrine with unwavering devotion on numerous projects, which included repainting the main ceiling and side altars. Upon John Picco and Ed Benson's retirement, Tim McClain, who had begun as their apprentice at the Shrine, formed his own company—PCB Painting—and became the third generation to inherit the calling to the Shrine.

This past August, Tim McClain, along with his longtime companion and fellow artisan, Dustin LaGarce, ascended scaffolding to renew the panel walls surrounding the Altar of Answered Prayers. Each panel of the sanctuary was scraped and cleaned with utmost patience, patched where time had taken its toll, and oil-primed twice to prevent bleed-through. Delicate lines were then drawn to align perfectly with the original panel borders. Before painting could begin, up to



Dustin LaGarce and Tim McClain

eighteen different tints had to be mixed and remixed to achieve the original colors of the wall panels. Upwards of eight hours of mixing pigments was required to match the original palette. The entire job took nearly three weeks, including weekends, to complete.



Throughout these five decades, the Shrine has been blessed not merely with skilled artisans, but with individuals who brought reverent hearts to their work. As Ted Wofford once observed, "Our group of artisans see this work as much more than just another job; they regard it as very personal." Ed Benson, who still offers his wisdom in consultation, speaks of the special bond: "The Shrine grabs a hold of you. All the artisans just fell in love with the Shrine, which led to providing so much care; it wasn't just another painting job. The Shrine still has a hold of me; it's an amazing place!" Tim McClain, upon completing the recent sanctuary work, echoed this devotion: "Dusty and I regard it as an honor and privilege to work at the Shrine. It's a special place. I've done work at a lot of different sites, including churches, and the Shrine is my favorite place that I've ever worked."

The Shrine stands today as a testament not only to faith, but to the faithful stewardship of those who have cared for it. We are grateful beyond measure for three generations of artisans whose skilled and devoted work, combined with the generous donations of our membership, have ensured that this sacred space will continue to serve and inspire generations yet to come.

The Shrine Shines at Christmas

Few churches in St. Louis—or perhaps anywhere—rival the Shrine's beauty and splendor during the Christmas season.

This year's preparations began on Saturday, December 13, when more than twenty volunteers gathered to decorate the entire church and rectory with more than thirty illuminated trees, garland, poinsettias, and the traditional life-size nativity scene on the east altar.

After Mass on Sunday, December 22, Santa and Mrs. Claus made their traditional visit with children, who eagerly shared their Christmas wishes.

Christmas Eve Mass at the Shrine has become a tradition for many families, and this year's Christmas Vigil once again provided an extraordinary experience of faith and beauty. The Shrine was filled to capacity as longtime music director Maribeth McMahon led the congregation in singing carols before Mass. In his homily, Fr. Dale inspired all in attendance with his words, "God's purpose for all humanity...happened in this infinitely approachable human form of a little baby. What we celebrate every Christmas...is God's purpose for all eternity. **Emmanuel: 'God with us.'** Jesus came into the world so God can share intimacy with each one of us every day of our lives."



Wedding Vows Echo Across Generations at the Shrine

Few moments in a parent's life carry the weight and joy of watching their child marry—especially when that sacred moment unfolds at the very altar where they once exchanged their own vows. This profound convergence of past and present occurred twice at the Shrine on a single November day, creating an extraordinary testament to the enduring bonds of faith, family, and love that connect one generation to the next.

On Saturday, November 15th, Dannielle Matthews and Chris Nuelle joined hands in marriage at 2:00 in the afternoon. Thirty-five years earlier to the day, in 1990, Chris's parents, Tracy and Mark Nuelle, had stood before the same Altar of Answered Prayers to make their own covenant before God. The family's roots at the Shrine run even deeper—Chris's grandfather devoted several years to volunteering in the Shrine Shoppe.



Dannielle & Chris Nuelle

Tracy & Mark Nuelle

Three hours later that same day, Grace Ciapciak and Dan Clodus exchanged their vows at 5:00 p.m.

For Grace's parents, Joseph and Janet—who had married at the Shrine 36 years earlier in 1989—the moment stirred cherished memories. "We were thrilled that Grace and Dan chose the Shrine to begin their marriage," Janet reflected warmly. "The Shrine holds such a special place in our hearts."



Janet & Joe Ciapciak



Grace (Ciapciak) & Dan Clodus

Both families marveled at how the Shrine's extraordinary beauty had remained unchanged across the decades. The church looked as magnificent as it had on their own wedding days, undiminished by the passage of time. They also noticed the same spirit of warmth and dedication embodied by the Shrine volunteers, who welcomed each couple with open hearts and great care.

Two families, two weddings, one sacred day—a beautiful celebration of love, commitment, and the continuity of faith passed from one generation to the next before the Altar of Answered Prayers.

Annual Ocktoberfest & Fall Fundraiser

Nearly 200 people filled the courtyard behind the rectory on Sunday, October 5th for the Shrine's annual Oktoberfest. All enjoyed barbecue, chili, various dishes, desserts, beverages, and fellowship. As tradition dictates, Filipino dancers shared their native culture through performance.



Photo by Brad Arteaga

The event organizer, Sheri Chibnall said, "Once again, I must give thanks to all the volunteers who pitch in to set up tents and tables, grill, cook, and serve food. They make it a fun and successful event every year."

Thanks to all members who generously participated in the fall fundraiser, which supports maintenance and improvements of the Shrine. The raffle winners were: 1st place: Janice Shook, O'Fallon, MO; 2nd place: Nick Laurence, Chesterfield, MO; 3rd place: Charles Carey, St. Louis, MO; and 4th place: Maribeth McMahon, St. Louis, MO.

Historic Organ Receives Keyboard Restoration

The Shrine continues its commitment to preserving its historic 136-year-old pipe organ, an instrument built by Johann Pfeffer and Sons that stands as the largest the company ever constructed. A recent restoration project focused on the organ's keyboard, which still contains the original manual keys installed in 1890.

Over more than a century of use, the keys had developed mechanical issues, such as wobbling and sticking during play that interfered with the organist's ability to produce consistent sound from this unique instrument.



The restoration presented a delicate challenge: repairing the keyboard's functionality while preserving the original ivory-covered keys. The Organ Guild Society of St. Louis has recognized the organ as "an instrument of exceptional historic merit and worthy of preservation," underscoring the importance of maintaining its authentic components.

This fall, Christopher Soer Pipe Organs LLC undertook the meticulous work. Technicians first removed the original keys allowing access to each manual key's trackers that connect to the organ's pipes. The keys were disconnected giving access to the key bed where pins that keep the keys in line rest. These pins were replaced, along with worn wood pieces that were disassembled and renewed. The bushing felt beneath the keys was also replaced to ensure optimal function. The ivory key tops, untouched by previous restorations, received careful buffing and polishing. After reinstalling the key bed, each individual key required weighting and testing to achieve uniform touch and response across the entire keyboard.

Christopher Soer, president of the restoration company, emphasized his firm's dedication to historic preservation and expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to work on such a rare instrument: "With few Pfeffer organs surviving, it is great to see the interest in preserving the organ continues at the Shrine."

Tours at the Shrine

Discover the Shrine's journey through faith, art, and history on a guided tour. Learn about its beautiful statues, German parish and Jesuit founders, Vatican-authenticated miracle, and the remarkable dedication that saved and restored the Shrine for future generations.

The Shrine hosts approximately 100 tour groups annually, led primarily by Jim Allen, who offers tours after Sunday Mass and by appointment.

"I'm blessed to have keys to the Shrine and share my access with others," Jim says. "We are fortunate to have volunteers who enjoy sharing the history of this magnificent church."

Tours welcome all, including Catholic groups, school students, seniors, Seminarians, architecture enthusiasts, and Sunday Mass worshippers.

Join a tour after mass, or schedule a visit by calling (314) 231-9407 or booking online at the Shrine's website (www.shrineofstjoseph.org).



The Holy Spirit's Connection through Space and Time

Excerpt from Father Dale's Homilies

Within the Easter season, we reflect upon the nature of the Church. Today, we emphasize who and what we are as a church, and Paul tells us we are all members of the Body of Christ. We are gifted by the Holy Spirit. No two of us can do exactly the same job. And what moves us is this: charism. St. Paul says that each of us receives this gift. So that begs the question: What is your gift? You need to spend some time thinking about this. As you do, let me give you a demonstration of how the Holy Spirit works through space and time.

In the front corner of the Shrine is the statue of **St. Alphonsus Rodriguez**, a rather obscure gentleman referred to as "Brother Alfonso." You've probably never heard of this Jesuit. He had a rough life. He was married and had four children, who all died when he was still young. He wanted to become a priest, so he offered himself to the Jesuits. However, the Jesuits told Alphonsus that he did not have the education to become a priest. So he became the seminary's doorkeeper. Thus, we have this obscure gentleman who seemingly doesn't have a lot of importance. Turns out he was very wise. All of the younger Jesuits liked to talk to and listen to him even though he didn't have much education. They came to him with their troubles, their difficulties, and their discernment issues. So what might you say was Alfonso's gift? I submit to you his gift was his presence. He was present and had a listening ear.

When Alfonso was 72 years old, a young Jesuit came along named **Peter Claver**. He was having difficulties with his own discernment over what he should be doing as a Jesuit. He spent time with Brother Alfonso, who encouraged him and stirred up within him the idea of going to the New World. Peter Claver eventually ended up in the port city of Cartagena in Colombia, where he found his gift of missionary zeal as well as the gift of a compassionate heart. He took care of all the slaves for over 35 years—reportedly baptizing over 3,000 of them.

Fast forward 200 years to here in the Midwest, to **Fr. Weninger**. He wanted Peter Claver to be canonized for his work. Fr. Weninger was a wonderful evangelist. He preached about Claver's work very effectively, playing a crucial role in the canonization of Peter Claver. Preaching was Fr. Weninger's gift.

What happened next occurred right here in this very church. One of the parishioners named **Ignatius Strecker** had been injured at work. For two years, Ignatius's wound kept getting worse, and eventually he was given two weeks to live. Through the instrumentality of his wife, Ignatius was brought to the Shrine while our friend, Father Weninger, was using his gift of preaching. There, Ignatius venerated the relic of Peter Claver and was miraculously healed.

Fast forward another 150 years to today. It is not inconceivable that people present in this church are here because of the gift of illness and faith of Ignatius Strecker, because of the gift of preaching by Fr. Weninger, because of the gift of compassion of Peter Claver, and ultimately because of the gift of presence by an obscure, simple man named Brother Alfonso.

That's how the Holy Spirit works through time and space. And we are all a part of that, my friends. That's what St. Paul tells us. So I ask you once again: **What is your gift?** And I invite you to say this little prayer: "Holy Spirit—enlighten me. Help me see what I am failing to see. Help me to see what my gift is, and help me to share it generously for the sake of our church and other members of the Body of Christ."



Fr. Dale Wunderlich

Goodbye to an Extraordinary Friend



At age 99, Ann Voss peacefully entered eternal life on October 15, 2025. Ann and her beloved husband Robert were instrumental in saving the Shrine, joining Fr. Filipiak and four others in founding the Friends of the

Shrine in the late 1970s. After Fr. Filipiak's tragic murder in 1979, Ann, Robert, and their son Bobby stayed at the rectory to protect the Shrine. Following Robert's passing in 1987, Ann continued her devoted service throughout the restoration years.

A woman of deep faith and compassion, Ann championed civil rights through leadership roles with the Archdiocese and human rights organizations. Her courageous stand during a school busing protest earned front-page coverage in the New York Times and the 1963 B'nai B'rith Award for Outstanding Contribution to Intergroup Understanding. A pillar of strength and lifelong advocate for social justice, Ann's legacy was honored by the St. Louis Board of Aldermen with a special resolution upon her passing.

A faithful presence at Shrine Masses throughout her later years, Ann will always be remembered with deep gratitude as a dedicated supporter of the Shrine and a courageous woman of steadfast faith.

See the Shrine in "Soul On Fire"



"Soul On Fire," the inspiring film chronicling John O'Leary's journey from tragedy to triumph alongside the heroes who lifted him up, premiered nationwide on October 10 and is now streaming on Netflix.

The movie beautifully captures the Shrine church, recreating John O'Leary's actual wedding ceremony held at the Shrine. The film's cinematography showcases the church sanctuary's stunning beauty, while the Shrine rectory's kitchen and dining room, along with the front courtyard, provide backdrops for several key scenes.

If you haven't seen this deeply moving film yet, now is a great time to watch it. Afterward, be sure to visit the Shrine Shoppe's special "Soul on Fire" exhibit, featuring movie memorabilia and behind-the-scenes photography.

Board Appointments

At its November meeting, the Shrine Board of Directors welcomed two new members: Karen Fesler and Mark Ames.

Karen and her husband Jim have devoted over 14 years to serving the Shrine as volunteers. Currently one of the Shrine's wedding coordinators, Karen reflects, "We were called to the Shrine through a healing



miracle that Jim experienced. My favorite part of volunteering is helping couples begin their marriage with the Church's blessing. I'm committed to doing whatever I can to keep the Shrine thriving as a place of worship, healing, and the reception of the sacraments."



Mark and his wife Carolyn began volunteering after their daughter, Amanda, was married at the Shrine in 2021. Mark works alongside Jim Fesler on the Shrine's weekly upkeep and assists Howard Matthews with newsletter production, while Carolyn helps with sacrament recording and fundraisers. Mark shares his connection: "Between the jaw-dropping beauty of the Shrine and the wonderful, dedicated volunteers we met, I was completely drawn in. When we learned of the pressing need for more volunteers, we were more than happy and, in fact, felt blessed to help."



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Please clip the address panel and mail it to us noting your correction or request.

Mass Times

Sundays: 11:00am
 First Friday of each Month: 12:00pm (Noon)
 Holy Days of Obligation:
 See Website www.shrineofstjoseph.org for details

Veneration of St. Peter Claver Relic or St. Padre Pio Relic following Mass
 Fr. Dale Wunderlich, Rector and Recipient
 of the Aquinas Institute "Great Preacher" Award.

Staying in touch with the Shrine:

www.shrineofstjoseph.org

facebook.com/shrineofstjoseph

YouTube St.Joseph Shrine

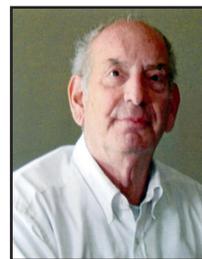
Supporting the Shrine with Your Membership



Sherry Chibnall

Restoration and conservation of the historic Shrine relies solely on private contributions. Basic membership is \$15 per person per year. However, if you can help out a little more, it would be greatly and humbly appreciated. We are grateful for your support and commitment to this historic Catholic landmark. Please make your check payable to "Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc."

Air & Steam Club



John Colao

Members of the Air & Steam Club have, for many years, helped to cover utility costs. Your donations have contributed greatly toward the Shrine's heating and AC bills. If you aren't currently a Member, please consider joining now. Your help is needed! There are monthly drawings for prizes totaling \$200. Tickets are \$12 each, and 1 ticket gives you 1 chance to win each month and there's no limit on the number of tickets you can purchase.

Simply complete the form below and mail it together with your check payable to:

"Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc."
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614.

For more information, please contact **John Colao**, Chairperson at (314) 231-9407.

Please Remember the Shrine in your Will or Trust.

Application for Membership & **Renewal Form**
 Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 Basic membership \$15 per person per year

Mr./Mrs./Ms. _____
 Street _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____
 Check \$ _____ Check Number _____
 Date _____ Cash \$ _____

Make checks payable to: Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614

Special Notice: Please be aware that the Shrine has not and does not give or sell names and addresses on our mailing list to any other groups or organizations.

Air and Steam Club
 Shrine of St. Joseph's Friends, Inc.
 1220 N. 11th Street, St. Louis, MO 63106-4614

1st Prize \$100
 2nd Prize \$50
 3rd Prize \$50

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Please enter my name. I do not wish to make a donation at this time.