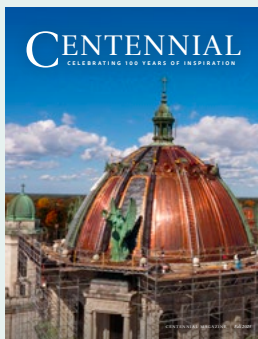


CENTENNIAL

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF INSPIRATION





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OLVCharities
A Father Baker Legacy

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About the Cover:

Work on the dome of OLV National Shrine & Basilica continued throughout the summer with new copper replacing the original, 100-year-old panels. Work is expected to continue into 2027.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We find ourselves living in challenging times. Global unknowns, wars, climate change, economic difficulties, and maybe even spiritual doubts surround us. So much is happening! In the midst of turmoil, it may seem like there is nothing but gloom and darkness. But now, more than ever, we need to see God's light and hear God's healing whispers for a broken world.

Jesus says: "You are the light of the world." As followers, we are called to reflect Christ's light to others, especially during these difficult times. For light dispels darkness and brings clarity. The smallest act of kindness, the simplest gesture of hospitality and welcome, the humblest sharing of our time or talent can shed light to others and build a better world. It's also a way of sharing hope with those who are struggling.

The good news? We have a mentor who can assist us with being a light in trying times. Venerable Nelson Baker was a beacon of light and hope to the poor and the needy during the Great Depression. He adapted to the times to meet the needs of the people to whom he ministered. Anyone in need could find a compassionate welcome, a listening ear, and a giving hand in the person of Father Baker—the woman on the street, the man in the bread line, or the orphan with nowhere to turn. By generously responding to the hungry, the homeless, the unemployed, and the physically or spiritually ill, he gave them hope and helped them experience peace.

Father Baker met the challenges of his day as a man of faith with absolute trust in his patroness, Our Lady of Victory. Both he and Our Lady will intercede for us in our struggles today if only we trust in God's presence. As we navigate the storms of life, we can take comfort in knowing that God is our refuge and strength, and an ever-present help to us in troubled times. This promise is a powerful message. It will help us find peace and joy in the assurance of God's light and love.

Together, you and I can be the beacons of light, hope, and peace needed in our struggling world through our words and our good works. I pray that God will guide us and our world. And may God bless us now and in the days ahead.



Gratefully yours in Christ,

Handwritten signature of Rev. Msgr. David G. LiPuma in blue ink.

Rev. Msgr. David G. LiPuma
Pastor/Rector, OLV National Shrine & Basilica
President, OLV Organizations

CEO'S MESSAGE

Dear Friends,

In a recent interview, Dr. Gavin Ashendon, a former Bishop and Chaplain to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, reflected on his journey from Anglicanism—“crossing the Tiber”—to becoming a Roman Catholic.

“God is very generous and can set a fire in the hearts of people. There is cause for immense hope because in every age, the Lord renews His church, and in every century, there are saints to give witness and to renew us, and Mary, Our Lady, is very much part of that.”



He goes on to suggest that there is a quiet, but powerful, renewal of the Catholic Church happening across the globe.

We learned that, during this past Easter season, the Church in France welcomed more than 17,800 adult catechumens, the highest number recorded since surveys began, and young adults (ages 18-25) constituted the largest segment of those newly received members. In addition, Roman Catholics now outnumber Anglicans 2:1 among young adults in England and Wales. When asked, those attending Mass say they have an “ache for something deeper, more ancient and authentic.”

And of course, how can one ignore the amazing spectacle of one million young people descending on Rome this past summer to celebrate the Jubilee of Youth Pilgrimage with newly elected Pope Leo XIV? And, only a few weeks later, the canonizations of Pier Giorgio Frassati and Carlo Acutis, the first millennial saint, suggest holiness is not just for figures of the distant past, but a message of hope for us today.

Here in the U.S., despite the “perfect storm” of the sexual abuse crisis, the impact of COVID on worship attendance, demographic trends, and secularization, there are signs of renewal. As more individuals are joining the Church than leaving, marked by a burst of growth in lay-led apostolates and evangelization-centered movements.

On a much smaller scale—but hopeful just the same—this past August, OLV Charities’ Catholic Parenting Initiative (CPI) organized and held its first-ever **Family Day** at the Fatima Shrine in Youngstown, N.Y. In the days leading up to the event, no one quite knew how many families would come out on a warm summer afternoon to something new. Well, as it turns out, more than 400 grandparents, parents, and children came for fun, food, and prayer! With live music, scavenger hunts, bounce houses, Eucharistic Adoration, Confession, and Mass, CPI’s Family Day provided attendees with ample opportunities for fellowship and to grow in their relationship with God. Throughout the day, volunteers heard from parents how important it was for them to be able to come together and feel connected to their faith, where children are encouraged to have fun, and where the domestic church is supported and affirmed.

It was a little victory, a sign of hope, another step in this quiet renewal through God’s generosity and abiding presence.

With deepest gratitude,

A handwritten signature in teal ink that reads “David J. Kersten”. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial “D”.

David J. Kersten
Chief Executive Officer, OLV Charities

SACRED SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

{ OLV Basilica Celebrates Two New Additions }

Sunday, June 8, 2025, was a special day at the Basilica as the OLV community celebrated the dedication of the new Father Baker Shrine and Smith & Gilbert Chancel Organ.

The Shrine is a masterwork designed and hand-crafted by OLV parishioner, Jon Trabucco, and his father, Victor. The piece is intricately decorated with religious symbols and imagery, paying tribute to Father Baker and his patroness, Our Lady of Victory. It is located by the humble priest's tomb.



designed the Basilica's main altar that was dedicated in 2016.

"It was an absolute honor to be involved with this project, and I hope people will enjoy the shrine for years to come," said Trabucco, who also



The new organ has been needed ever since the main organ failed during a Mass in 2023. Both additions were made possible through the generosity of donors.



"Any time new pieces are added to the interior of the Basilica, it's a big deal," said Father David. "So, we are thrilled to be able to add the new shrine and organ, knowing that both will enhance the sights and sounds of this special place."



{ The Dome Restoration Project Continues }

When construction on the Basilica was completed in 1925, its copper dome was a point of pride. At 80 feet in diameter, it was the second largest dome in the country at the time, smaller only than the U.S. Capitol building. For a century, though, it has endured harsh lake-effect winds, rain, and snow. Originally built with 16-ounce sheeting, much of its copper has thinned beyond repair, leaving the option of installing new patches impossible.

As you may know, a major restoration project is currently underway to preserve the Basilica's signature feature. The new copper roofing is being constructed of 20-ounce sheeting and is expected to last 100+ years!

Work is planned in stages: by the end of 2025, seven of the dome's 16 bays will be opened and secured; by the end of 2026, all bays will be replaced and two of its four angels cleaned and repaired; and by the end of 2027, the cupola and all four angels will be fully restored and all of the scaffolding removed.

Once done, the project will ensure the Basilica's dome remains a lasting symbol of resilience and faith.



“NEVER IN A MILLION YEARS!”



Recently, members of the New York State Assembly were on campus for a check presentation in support of OLV Basilica’s ongoing dome restoration project. It ended up being an event few will forget.

Assemblyman Patrick Burke was the first to take the podium, talking about the decision behind supporting the work on the Shrine with a \$250,000 contribution. “This place isn’t just a church,” he said. “It’s part of the DNA of Western New York. Father Baker and the Basilica are built into who we are.”

After the applause ended, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie stepped forward and erased the amount on the check, changing it to \$1.2 million—far more than anyone had anticipated! “The best way to thank Father Baker for his lifetime of helping others is to continue supporting his mission.”

The move shocked everyone, including Father David. “Never in a million years, and I mean that, did I think he was going to go from \$250,000 to \$1.2 million. That kind of gift is transformational. It’s going to help us finish what we started and ensure that OLV Basilica will be a spiritual beacon of hope for another 100 years.”



“Polishing the CROWN JEWEL”

{ *Two Interior Restoration Projects Getting Underway* }

The Basilica’s dome is not the only feature to receive some tender loving care over the next several months. Two other restoration projects are set to breathe new life into the Shrine, ensuring its beauty and artistry continue to inspire future generations.

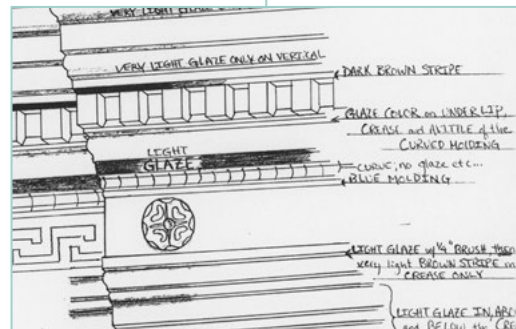
INTERIOR LIGHTING PROJECT

For decades, the Basilica’s downward-facing fixtures have left its extraordinary artwork in shadow. As a result, masterpieces such as the dome’s rendering of Mary’s Assumption and Coronation have become difficult to fully appreciate. This new project will introduce a reimagined lighting plan, featuring energy-efficient LED uplighting, modern dimming, and preset controls adaptable for daily Mass, vespers, and special events. Even the Stations of the Cross will be illuminated with greater reverence. Work has already begun and is scheduled to be completed in Spring of 2026.

PLASTER & PAINT RESTORATION

The other restoration project addresses the Shrine’s aging interior plaster and paint. Time and water damage have weakened ceilings and dulled artistry in several sections. Restoration work will reinforce plaster ceilings, restore intricate ornamentation, and uncover original details hidden beneath a 1940s-era paint job. Using the Shrine’s authentic color palette, skilled craftspeople will return the Basilica’s interior to its original splendor. By the end of 2025, most of the main church will be restored/repainted, with the sanctuary’s renewal to be the focus of work in 2026.

“Together, these projects promise not only to preserve the Shrine’s structural integrity but to better highlight its artistic treasures,” says Msgr. David LiPuma. “This work will bring worshippers and visitors closer to the beauty that has made the Basilica a landmark of faith for 100 years!”





A SYMPHONY OF FAITH

{ *Music Unites the OLV Community* }

If you have ever visited OLV National Shrine & Basilica, odds are you have been touched by the beautiful music filling its majestic interior. Whether attending a Mass with the OLV Choir, cantors, or Folk Music Group, or one of the Centennial concerts, the significance of music cannot be overstated. Since the Centennial Celebration began in 2021, the Basilica has welcomed a wide variety of performances, drawing thousands of visitors. Heard alongside the interior of the Basilica's sublime craftsmanship, the music offers a wonderful experience.



Recent highlights include the OLV Centennial Concerts featuring JoAnn Falletta and the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra in 2022 and 2024, the Buffalo Philharmonic Chorus' annual performance

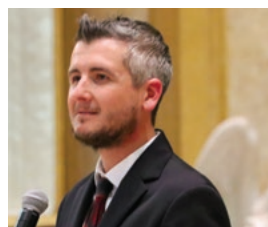
of Handel's *Messiah*, and performances by ensembles such as the St. John Paul II Schola Cantorum, Incipio Choral Ensemble, and Harmonia Chamber Singers.

The Centennial Organ Recital Series showcased OLV's own organist Peter Gonciarz, along with Roland Martin, Garrett Martin, Timothy Smith, and Joel S. Kumro.

Seasonal music continues to enrich worship, from Celtic

tunes by Kindred on St. Patrick's Day to the summertime Jazz Mass. And the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, featuring the OLV Choir, has become a cherished Christmas tradition.

"Music touches and impacts people in ways words cannot, often bringing healing and peace," reflects Peter, who also serves as OLV's Director of Music. "OLV is such a welcoming community, and our music ministry continues to adapt, evolve, and inspire."



It is also Peter's responsibility to coordinate choirs, recruit and train cantors, and provide music for all of the Shrine's liturgies, weddings, funerals, and school Masses. In addition, he plans for OLV's weekly and televised

Masses, cares for the Basilica's two pipe organs, and maintains the music library. And while that may sound like a lot, Father David says the best is yet to come!

"Peter has done an excellent job, and I think the improving quality of our music program has really heightened our celebrations," he says with a smile. "Peter and I will continue to explore things to make sure we are always offering the best we can."

By Kelli Eagan



What's every parent's greatest wish? A healthy child. But what happens when that wish is out of reach AND the system that exists to help only adds to the frustration?

Meet the Ryan family.

Their daughter Marilyn's early years were full of joy. But, at age two, everything changed with a diagnosis: autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

"It was as though a switch was flipped," said Rich Ryan, Marilyn's dad. "Almost overnight, she stopped hitting development milestones. It felt like the daughter we had gotten to know suddenly slipped away."

From that moment, the Ryan family had to adjust their lives

to best handle their daughter's needs. Marilyn was non-verbal and, as such, couldn't express how she felt. She started fleeing the house, which had to be modified with locks, alarms, and secure windows just to keep her safe.

At that time, the Ryans vowed that Marilyn would have access to the best therapies and treatments. Unfortunately, even though some progress was made, challenges mounted. At seven, Marilyn began to experience seizures. Worse, the prescribed medications came with side effects that made her irritable, aggressive, and violent. Self-harming behaviors appeared more frequently, and Marilyn's growing strength made it difficult for her parents to keep her from hurting herself or others.

"Marilyn's care was exhausting, overwhelming, and, at times,

deeply discouraging,” said Katie Ryan, Marilyn’s mom. “We met with multiple doctors, sometimes traveling long distances, but each visit followed the same frustrating pattern: we’d answer the same questions we answered countless times before and listen to the same recycled suggestions. It felt like Marilyn was a number on a clipboard.”

After years of searching, though, Rich and Katie’s prayers were finally answered. When they arrived at OLV Human Services’ Evaluation and Treatment Center for an appointment that included a meeting with the agency’s Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Ted Andrews, the difference was immediate.

“When we first met with Dr. Ted, he spent nearly an hour with us going through Marilyn’s daily routines, therapies, medications, struggles and achievements,” Katie remembers. “From that very first meeting, we could tell he genuinely cared and was committed to helping our daughter.”

That day, Dr. Andrews prescribed new medications and reached out to medical colleagues to address Marilyn’s needs. He even gave Katie his personal cell phone number to call whenever she had questions. “I could see they were beside themselves,” Dr. Andrews says. “They just wanted someone to listen to them and understand what they were going through.”

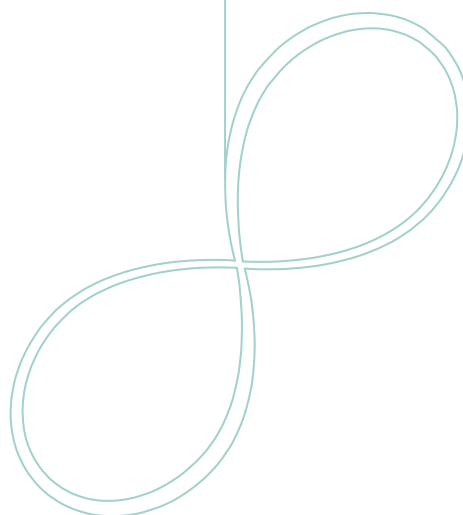
Since that day, Dr. Andrews, his colleagues and the Ryans have worked collaboratively on Marilyn’s care. And the results have been promising. For the first time in as long as they could remember, Rich and Katie weren’t the only ones carrying the full burden of coordinating Marilyn’s treatment. Instead, they are able to focus on the most important thing: being loving parents.

“This is the first time in Marilyn’s entire journey that we feel supported,” says a smiling Katie. “Her needs are being addressed through real collaboration, and she is being treated like a human being that deserves every opportunity for happiness. We love Dr. Ted because his compassionate approach has been nothing short of a godsend!”

By John Pitts



Dr. Ted Andrews



BEYOND CHILDHOOD

{ *Meeting the Lifelong Needs of Families Living with Autism* }

*“As he gets older and stronger,
I get older and weaker.”*

-PARENT OF AN ADOLESCENT WITH SEVERE AUTISM

Recent information from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services shows that one out of 36 children being born these days will be diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). And of those ...

- Approximately 30% are either non-verbal or are limited in their ability to speak
- More than 40% have some type of aggressive or self-injuring behavior. Although this percentage goes down in adulthood, it's still a significant figure



- About 38% have some type of intellectual disability, with a similar percentage having average or higher IQs
- The average cost to care for a child with ASD throughout their lifetime is projected to be approximately \$2.4 million. These costs include therapies, special education, medical expenses, and lost parental productivity

These children become adults, but unlike those of us who do not have a neurodevelopmental disability such as autism, many do not become independently functioning people.

Imagine your child cannot ever be alone—regardless of age. As they grow into adulthood, the cost to provide 24/7 supervision increases and the availability of providers to assist in this care decreases. Where will they live once they “age out” of school-based services? Who will take care of them once you pass away or become incapable of adequately caring for them? Will their care fall to siblings? What if the siblings cannot care for them? Those of us who have not had to contend with these questions can't possibly know how we would manage them.

For many of us, age 18 is the starting point of increased independence for our children. It is an exciting time, one of opportunity and celebration. For families with a loved one with severe or profound autism, entering adulthood is the starting point of increased worry and stress for all the reasons mentioned above.

What is the answer? At OLV Human Services, we believe it lies in truly listening to the real-life scenarios of our families. Those whose homes have been damaged as a result of aggressive and/or violent behavior of their child. Those who cannot leave their adult child alone for any period of time and have no support to give them a break. The families who have to plan every waking minute of every day to ensure that their loved one is safe and that they, as caregivers, are safe.

The list of issues is long, and we can no longer behave as though it will be taken care of by “somebody else.” We ARE that “somebody else.”

By working together with each family, advocacy groups, and our state/local partners, we strive to address, in a meaningful way, the complex problems that having severe autism presents. Access to knowledgeable professionals and support personnel and community housing is critical. We have plans to fill the gap in continuous service for people with severe autism and their families by working with them to truly understand and meet their needs. Because no parent should have to ever worry about their child’s future because he or she “gets older and stronger, while I get older and weaker.”

*By Cindy Lee
Chief Executive Officer, OLV Human Services*



Cindy leads OLV Human Services (OLVHS), one of the region’s largest non-profit entities. OLVHS and its affiliates cared for between 10,000 and 12,000 children, teens, and adults last year through a variety of outpatient, residential, and educational programs. To learn more, visit OLVHS.org.



A group of four young adults, two men and two women, are standing outdoors in front of a white bus. The bus has "TURNER" and "ALV Charit" visible on its side. The man on the far left is wearing a dark blue t-shirt with "MCKENZIE" on it. The man next to him is wearing a red t-shirt with a name tag that says "HOWIE McNEIL". The woman next to him is wearing a dark blue t-shirt with "DAT LUPPT!" on it. The man on the far right is wearing a black t-shirt. They are all smiling at the camera. The background shows green trees and orange flowers.

FROM AROUND THE GLOBE TO ALLEGANY

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ENJOY A SUMMER TO REMEMBER AT CAMP TURNER

This summer, four international counselors traded bustling city streets and faraway homelands for the winding trails and starry skies of Allegany State Park. For six unforgettable weeks, Camp Turner became a second home to Amos Thomas of Nigeria (by way of Hungary), William Jefferson from England, Howie McNeil from Scotland, and Mareen Friedericic from Germany.

Drawn by a shared desire to connect with nature and inspire children, the group joined the team at Camp Turner through Camp America, embarking on an adventure that would leave a lasting impression on both them and their campers.

"They ventured almost blindly into the unknown and were willing to accept whatever was thrown their way, adding seasoning and character to the staff," said Camp Director John Mann. "And in return,

they brought something just as valuable: a cultural richness that made this summer one that campers won't soon forget."



AMOS

Originally from Nigeria and currently studying in Hungary, Amos learned about the Camp America exchange program from a friend and dove right in. As the summer wound

down, he reflected on how much his communication skills had improved, one of his personal goals prior to flying across the Atlantic.

"I have always enjoyed meeting new people, but making a connection with them is something I wanted to improve. I'm currently studying public health and better understanding people and communities is important. My time at Camp Turner helped so much. I met so many nice people."



WILLIAM

As a lifelong camper himself, William already enjoyed the outdoors. So, what better way to expand that love of nature while exploring a new country at the

same time? While he knew he was going to love Camp Turner's campfires and creek walks, as the weeks passed by, he became surprised by how gratifying it was to work with young people.

"After just a few days, I felt I was actually impacting the campers' lives. I realized you can have quite a positive influence on them when they are at a young age and be able to guide them in the right direction. That was awesome for me."



HOWIE

As he looked at various camp experiences in the U.S., Howie had the sense from all he read that Camp Turner offered a special, family-like focus. Fast forward several weeks

and he was not disappointed.

When asked what the biggest challenge a counselor faces, he smiled and responded quickly: "Bedtime, for sure."

He identified problem solving as an area of personal growth for him over the summer. *"I'm better able to deal with issues while they are happening and learning how to teach kids a lesson at the same time. I want to make sure they realize what happened and think about what they can do to stop it from happening again."*



MAREEN

A returning Camp Turner counselor, Mareen came back because of the relationships she made last year—"I wanted to see everybody again!" A skilled artist herself, Mareen had lots of fun working with

campers on crafts and using all of the lessons she learned last summer.

"I love arts and crafts. I love teaching the kids and being creative with them, getting them to show their creative side and discovering how great the experience can be. That's what's fun and gratifying for me."

BEHIND THE SCENES

This experience was once again made possible by Tony and Janice Ogorek, who helped support the exchange program in 2024 as well.

"The wonderful thing is, wherever these counselors end up in life, they're never going to forget the experience they had in Western New York, at Camp Turner," said Tony. *"To me, that's one of the best ways to use your resources. Because when you invest in young people, you invest in our future."*



Would you like to support Camp Turner's mission and help change

lives like Tony and Janice? If so, contact Kevin McLaughlin at (716) 828-9530 or kmclaughlin@olvcharities.org for information.

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf



A WEEK IN THE WOODS



NATIVITYMIGUEL STUDENTS DISCOVER JOY & GROWTH AT CAMP TURNER

For new students from NativityMiguel Middle School of Buffalo, the start of the school year brought more than books and backpacks ... it brought adventure. Thanks to a partnership with Camp Turner and OLV Charities, students were invited to spend a transformative week immersed in nature.

"It's pretty amazing," says Christopher Pitek, head of school at NativityMiguel. "This is about building community, exploring new opportunities, and helping kids push their comfort zones."

For many of these young people from inner-city communities, it was not only their first time immersed in nature, but their first time away from home without phones or family. "At first, you could tell they were nervous, a little scared," says former NativityMiguel student-turned chaperone, Joe Jones. "But, soon, they came out of their shells. They loved it!"

The camp experience was packed with new experiences from horseback riding and archery to creek walks and simply listening to the sounds of the woods. Each day, students were encouraged to connect with nature and with one another.

"I realized I didn't need my phone or anything. I could just play, meet new friends and relax," said one camper.

Added another: "I really liked the water park and the hills ... and archery? Wow! I'd do that a million more times if I could."

For Pitek, the impact was clear. "Some of these kids have never experienced solitude like this. They're walking in the woods, falling in the water, laughing, and realizing it's okay. This is growth."





A NEW LIGHT

{ St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center supports families in need }

At a young age, Kiara stood at a crossroads. Rebellious and emotionally distant from family and loved ones, she had spent years pushing people away, trying to shield herself from pain. And then it happened.

“I wasn’t prepared at all,” she says, recalling the moment she discovered she was pregnant. “I felt alone. I didn’t want to be another teenager who got pregnant and didn’t finish high school.” **But one conversation changed everything.**

A friend urged Kiara to visit the St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center, just to see what support might be available to her. “That’s exactly what I did,” she remembers. “And just knowing I could have support from people who didn’t even know me ... that made a huge difference.”

The mission of the St. Gianna Center is simple but powerful: to walk alongside women like Kiara by offering not only material aid such as diapers, clothing, bottles, and cribs, but also emotional and spiritual encouragement.

“Especially in the first few days, we want parents to focus on the gift of their baby, not the financial burden,” says Sarah Lindstrom, program director.

Kiara points to Sarah as being at the heart of her transformation, serving as a soothing, encouraging voice of reason in a hectic time. “She’s always one call or text away whenever I need something or someone. And to know that’s true, it’s huge.”

Now that she has had her baby, Kiara glows with a renewed sense of purpose. “I feel a lot more free, excited, and just happy for life,” she says. “I’m looking forward to the future and I know I’m loved.”

To learn more about the mission of the St. Gianna Center or to get involved, check out stgiannaoutreach.org or call (716) 828-2229.



CATHOLIC PARENTING INITIATIVE'S



FAITH, FOOD & FUN

The Catholic Parenting Initiative's (CPI) first-ever Family Day, held at Our Lady of Fatima Shrine in Youngstown, N.Y., proved to be a big hit with people of all ages, drawing approximately 400 children, teens and adults for a great day of free summer fun.

The event featured food, kids' activities, two separate scavenger hunts, live music, and opportunities for adoration and confession. The day concluded with an outdoor Mass.



For more information on CPI and its mission of strengthening the faith of parents and children, check out cpiwny.org or scan this QR code with your smartphone.





**CATHOLIC
PARENTING
INITIATIVE**

A ministry of  LV



Centennial Happenings: A WEEKEND OF CELEBRATIONS

Father Baker Weekend 2025 proved to be a big hit. From festive celebrations to solemn memories, from shiny pennies to delicious chicken BBQ, there was something for everyone!

JULY 26 - JAZZ MASS & TENT PARTY

OLV's Jazz Mass once again packed folks into the Shrine for a toe-tapping celebration of scripture and song. Immediately following Mass, a tent party, featuring live music and food trucks, awaited attendees.

JULY 27 - PENNY DROP

The delightful tradition of filling the entranceway to the Basilica up with loose change continued. Families came from far and wide to drop off their loose change and contribute to the Shrine's dome restoration project.

JULY 27 - FATHER BAKER DAY MASS

The 89th Annual Father Baker Day Mass paid tribute to the "Padre of the Poor," Venerable Nelson Baker. Mass concluded with the placing of a wreath at his tomb by members of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

JULY 27 - PENNIES TO HEAVEN FAMILY CARNIVAL

This year's carnival had it all—a chicken BBQ, basket raffles, tons of kids' activities and plenty of live music.

Miss out? Keep your eyes peeled for details on next year's Father Baker Weekend activities!





*Help us celebrate
the end of our*
**CENTENNIAL
CELEBRATION!**

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 2026
Centennial Gala at The Statler Golden Ballroom

SUNDAY, MAY 31, 2026
*Centennial Mass and Reception at
OLV National Shrine & Basilica*

For more information, or to be involved, please call (716) 828-9610.

OH, WHAT A NITE!



This year's sold-out Victory Nite event was an unforgettable evening. Thanks to the incredible support of our sponsors, donors, and attendees, the event raised critical funds needed to further Father Baker's mission.

As is usually the case, the evening was highlighted by the presentation of the Father Baker Legacy Awards, honoring individuals who exemplify our founder's dedication to improving the lives of others. This year's honorees were:

- Lackawanna natives, Ron and Liz Jaworski, who have dedicated their lives to giving back to those in need through the JAWS Youth Playbook program which focuses on improving the health and wellness of at-risk youth. Ron was a former quarterback for the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles and long-time ESPN sportscaster.
- Amy J. Habib, a devoted community leader and philanthropist who has generously supported countless organizations across Western New York. She is a passionate advocate for Catholic education.



WATCH RON & LIZ'S VIDEO



Ron and Liz Jaworski



WATCH AMY'S VIDEO



Amy Habib



WATCH NOLA'S VIDEO



Nola Marrero and Family



- The Father Baker Youth Service Award was presented to Nola Marrero, a junior at Mt. Mercy Academy. A dynamic student leader with a passion for service to those in need, Nola is well known for organizing events that support those in need.

We are deeply grateful for the amazing generosity of our sponsors, donors, and attendees for making this event so successful. And we are thankful for the dedication of Carl (CJ) and Kelly Montante, III, and Kevin and Ann Marie Gannon, co-chair couples of the event, and the members of their outstanding committee. Thanks to all who support this wonderful event!

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, ofsf





ANSWERING THE CALL

{ *A Volunteer's Heartbeat* }

When Amanda English first walked through the doors of OLV National Shrine & Basilica, she wasn't just looking for a place to worship, she was searching for something deeper.

"I was on fire for my faith and seeking a spiritual home," she recalls. That spark of spiritual longing quickly ignited into something more: a calling, a ministry, and eventually, a vibrant community known as Victorious Hearts.

Born out of a simple desire to connect and help others grow in their faith, Victorious Hearts has blossomed into a quarterly event that welcomes everyone—young and old, single and married, members of OLV Parish and non-parishioners alike. Each gathering begins with time for hospitality followed by an activity or a speaker focused on the Catholic faith.

"We try to make each event relatable and fun, which is why the social part, I think, is necessary. I think about Christ who gathered people around bread, around wine, around the fire, and that's where the learning began," Amanda says. "We like to get people together to learn and share with each other."



And because she believes that "volunteering makes one's life worthwhile," she recently expanded her circle of volunteerism and chaired this summer's two-day Pennies to Heaven event. She has also joined the dedicated "green thumbs" that make up OLV's gardening committee. Amanda sees the positive changes that getting involved has had on her and has become focused on looking for others who may be searching for their own call.

"I'd say, for anyone who is looking for greater purpose or fulfillment, service is a gift. One is blessed by serving others" explains Amanda. "[Service] is helpful with self-discovery, understanding how God is calling you to grow, and you can always take something beautiful from the experience. And volunteering opens opportunities, giving you new things to

learn and people to meet."

But being a volunteer can bring challenges such as expectations, patience, and being able to understand the viewpoints of others. For Amanda, though, the benefits far outweigh any negatives.

"I would say that stepping outside your comfort zone sometimes can be a little scary, but God never gives us a mission that he doesn't equip us for.

Christmas: A SEASON OF GIVING



For many, Christmas is a special day filled with joy, traditions and gifts. For others, though, it's a sullen day, with no presents to open, no special dinners, and no festivities to enjoy.

You can change that by making it a memorable day for the young people served by OLV Human Services (OLVHS) by providing gifts that will make this Christmas a magical day for all ... and you don't have to leave your house! The process is easy:

1. Children and families of OLVHS provided a list of items they need or want. A "wish list" of all of these things was compiled and put on an Amazon Gift Registry.
2. Those who wish to support this program can go to the wish list (scan the code below with your phone) and purchase one or more items and have them shipped directly to OLV Charities. Cash donations are also welcomed.

"The holidays are such a joyful time, but, for some, it's a sorrowful time," says Nancy LiTullip, one of the many generous donors who made last Christmas special for a family by purchasing items from their wish list. "Whatever you can do to make someone's day brighter, is really good."



If you—or a group of friends or coworkers—are interested in volunteering to sort or wrap gifts, please contact Shannon Donovan at (716) 828-9610.

Note: Please be sure to click "Share my shipping info" when you purchase from the registry as Amazon only shares your account name with us and we'd like to be able to properly thank you!



"The holidays are such a joyful time, but, for some, it's a sorrowful time. Whatever you can do to make someone's day brighter, is really good."

-NANCY LITULLIP, GIFT DRIVE DONOR





A HERO RISES

{ Father Baker's Greatest Acts of Compassion Occurred Very Late in His Life }

Picture this: It's 1929. The stock market has just crashed. Banks are folding. Breadlines are stretching down city blocks. And ordinary Americans are losing everything. The Great Depression has arrived ... and no one knows how long the suffering will last.

But, in Western New York, while despair hung heavy in the air, one man was rolling up his sleeves. A man whose faith and compassion made him a light in dark, dark times. His name? Venerable Nelson Baker.

"THE LIGHT SHINES IN DARKNESS"

There's little question that, by the time the Depression hit, Father Baker could have said, "I'm already doing enough!" His sprawling campus included, at the time, the orphanage and protectory, OLV Infant Home, OLV Hospital, OLV School,

and, of course, the recently completed OLV Basilica. Not too far away were the Working Boys' Home and OLV Farm. His plate was already full and his charitable works had become legendary.

But, if we know anything about Father Baker, we know he couldn't sit still when there was a need to fill. And, at the advent of the Great Depression, need surrounded him.

In response to the economic devastation, he launched an effort that became known as the "City of Charity." This work became a critical lifeline for Western New Yorkers who were struggling through the worst economic crisis of their time.

Beginning on Christmas Day in 1930, when Father Baker invited all unemployed people to come to the OLV campus for dinner, his institutions became a beacon of light.

Between 1930 and 1933, the "City of Charity" served more than 450,000 meals, provided 20,000 nights of free lodging and distributed thousands of coats, suits, dresses and pairs of shoes. In addition, 1,500 individuals received free medical

care at OLV Hospital. All that was required from those that sought help was to stick out a hand and ask.

Amazingly, though, not everybody approved of his generosity-without-strings-attached approach. In a conversation with a friend, the humble priest explained his philosophy:

“I’ve often been criticized for taking care of these poor people. But let’s put ourselves in their position. Some of them have been careless and others may be unable to find work. They are hungry and cold. What would we do if we were hungry and cold and had no means to take care of ourselves? God is blessing our work. I have found that the more we give away, the more we get!”

A story from the time demonstrates his dedication to compassion. One day, Father Baker’s assistants noticed that several men in line would receive their meal and a few quarters from the humble priest and then rush to the back of the line to receive the food and money again. When told about what was happening, Father Baker’s response caught his fellow priests off-guard: “When I die, the Good Lord will not ask me if they were worthy. But he might ask me if I gave.”

There was another benefit to all of this generosity. The boys in Father Baker’s institutions who were old enough to receive vocational training soon became masters of their crafts. Prospective cooks cooked, apprentice cobblers made shoes, young tailors made clothes and would-be farmers got plenty of training in growing crops needed for all the free meals. Truly, this was charity in action: practical, immediate, and rooted in dignity for all.

“UPHOLD THE CAUSE OF THE OPPRESSED”

But Father Baker’s efforts didn’t stop at meeting physical needs. While recovering from a broken arm in December of 1931, the humble priest looked out from his bedroom window in the protectory building at the food lines below. Among those waiting was a group of African American men who were speaking with the priests.

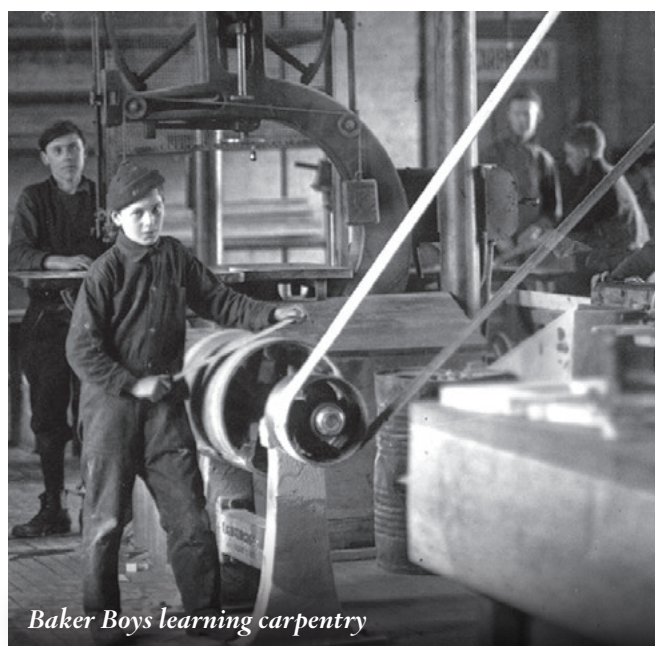
Father Baker sent word down to the men to join him in his quarters. When they came up and stood before him, Father



OLV Farm



Working Boys Home



Baker Boys learning carpentry



Baker Boys making clothes



The Black Apostolate



Baker asked how they were doing and what he could do to help. He ended the conversation with a simple question: “Would any of you like to become Catholic?” **The answer was yes.**

And that was all it took. Father Baker leaned into the idea. Once he recovered, he began teaching a small group of African American men and women about the faith. Thirty at first. Then more. And more.

Said one of the women involved with the program: “Father Baker didn’t seem to mind our ragged clothes or worn-out shoes. He seemed to love us anyway. His hugs and kisses on the forehead or cheek were real and firm. You can’t fool children, especially poor ones. We KNEW he loved us.”

The movement grew and soon, Father Thomas Galvin, a former “Baker Boy” himself, joined the effort. Together, Fathers Galvin and Baker led classes that resulted in hundreds of baptisms, First Communion, and Confirmations. By 1935, nearly 700 baptisms had taken place. Additionally, seven weddings between couples who met through the classes were celebrated between 1932 and 1935.

For Father Baker, it wasn’t just about numbers. It was about joy. Of the Black Apostolate, as the program became known, he wrote to a friend: “Once I thought the only thing that would please me was when I built the Basilica. But this has pleased me more.”

Remember that, at this time, Father Baker had reached the age of 90, far older than the average lifespan of most Americans at the time (60). But despite his many years, everything in his writing seems to indicate that this program, in particular, reinvigorated him, spiritually and physically.

At a time when segregation and exclusion were the norm, Father Baker’s embrace of the Black community was both radical and Christ-like. **And still, he wasn’t finished.**

As the Depression dragged on, young women faced particular hardship. Many were unemployed with nowhere to go and no

safety net to catch them. Father Baker recognized the danger: without shelter or support, these women could be forced into desperate situations.

Having seen this same concept work within his existing Working Boys' Home, he sought out community leaders to assist in the creation of the Working Girls' Home on Auburn Street in downtown Buffalo. The property served as a safe place where unemployed women could live until they found jobs.

This new ministry was so successful, a second home was opened on Jersey Street in 1935. Father Baker summed the work up simply but powerfully:

“We are saving these poor girls from a bad life and one of misery.”

“WE WALK BY FAITH”

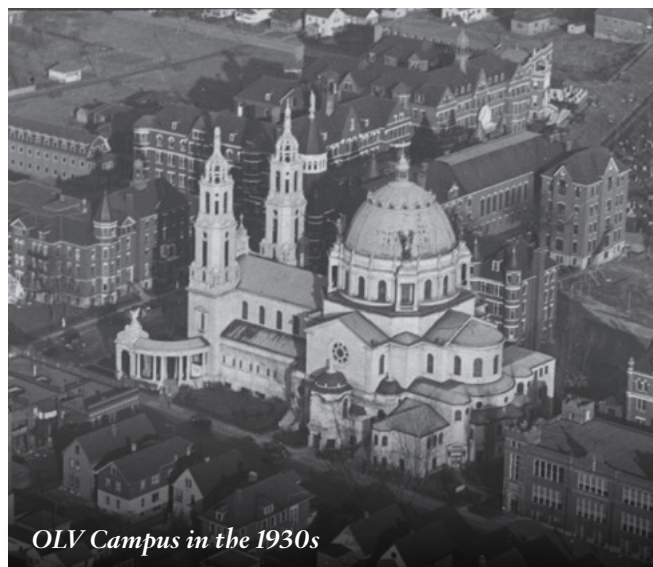
The Great Depression left scars on America. But in Western New York, it also left behind a legacy of compassion, courage, and radical welcome.

Through the heroic work of the “City of Charity,” the Black Apostolate, and the Working Girls' Home, Father Baker showed everyone what happens when faith meets action and belief moves mountains. Lives were saved. Souls were welcomed. And communities were strengthened.

In a time of deep despair, he offered the most precious commodity of all: **hope**.

And maybe that's the real lesson for us today. Hard times will come, but even in the darkest hours, there's always room to answer the call—to see a need and to act.

If you enjoyed this historical deep dive into the inspirational life story of Venerable Nelson Baker, visit fatherbaker.org, listen to the “Father Baker: Retold” podcast, or follow us on social media.





Remembering EUGENE “GENE” VUKELIC

On August 3, the OLV organizations lost a dear friend and loyal supporter of Father Baker’s mission, Eugene “Gene” Vukelic.

The Vukelic Family grew up in the shadow of OLV National Shrine & Basilica. Gene’s connection with OLV goes back to the days when Father Baker frequented the family’s restaurant to enjoy Mrs. Vukelic’s good Croatian cooking. That relationship continued in the years that followed as Gene and his wife, Carole, served on the board of directors at Baker Victory Services (now known as OLV Human Services) and chaired/sponsored several of the organization’s fundraising activities.

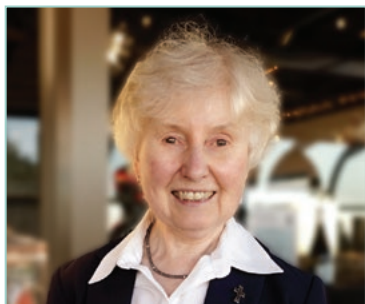
Gene was the esteemed chairman of Try-It Distributing Company, Inc., and a respected figure in throughout the region. Everyone he met was treated with respect and dignity.

We celebrate the life and qualities of this remarkable man while deeply mourning his loss and are profoundly grateful for his goodness, leadership, compassion and selfless generosity.

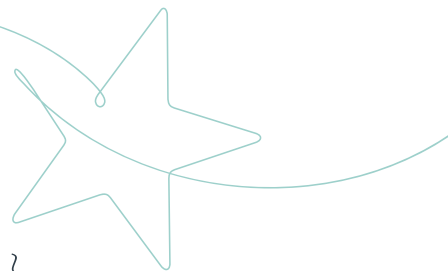
The members of the OLV family offer prayers of sympathy and comfort to his wife, children, grand and great-grandchildren. May God’s peace and love surround them and give them comfort.

Requiescat in Pace, dear friend!





A Shining Example of SERVICE & SPIRIT



{ *Congratulations on Your Retirement, Sister Mary Ellen!* }

The end of August found the OLV family saying a tearful goodbye to a familiar voice to donors as Sister Mary Ellen Twist, RSM, retired from OLV Charities after years of dedicated service.

While you may never have met her, odds are you have been touched by her spirit. Since coming on board in 2016, Sister Mary Ellen made thousands of phone calls to donors, thanking them for their support, listening to their stories, and receiving their prayer requests. In addition, she was a frequent writer of the weekly email, social media, and podcast prayers sent out by the organization.

“Her joyful spirit and unwavering commitment have been a shining example of our mission in action,” says Cronan Long, Director of Major Gifts and Planned Giving, Sister Mary Ellen’s supervisor.

Please join us in congratulating Sister Mary Ellen on her retirement. We are deeply grateful for her listening ear and compassionate presence!

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf

GOODBYE & HELLO



The term of three long-time members of the OLV Charities board of directors has come to end. We are grateful for the dedication of Pat Boyle (joined the board in 2016), Tom Baker (2018), and Beth Ieraci (2019).

All three served as officers (Pat was board chair between 2022 and 2025) and were passionate ambassadors who invested their time and expertise in keeping Father Baker’s mission alive and well.

“Their distinguished leadership, vision, and guidance have been invaluable to our organization,” says David Kersten, OLV Charities CEO. “Pat, Tom and Beth have been such a blessing. We will miss them all.”

Joining the board will be a pair of newcomers in Terry Greene, a retired CFO with W.H. Greene & Associates, and Nicole Tzetzso, Principal at Tzetzso Companies. We welcome them to the OLV organizations and look forward to working with them in continuing Father Baker’s legacy of caring!

Upcoming EVENTS

In August of 2021, we celebrated 100 years since the Basilica's cornerstone was laid and blessed ... *but that was just the beginning!* Over the next five years, the Centennial Celebration will honor the Shrine's first century and blaze a vibrant path for the next 100 years.

Nativity Set Exhibit

Dozens of Nativity sets from around the world, part of Father Roy Herberger's unique collection, will be on display in the lower level of the Basilica throughout Advent.

Stained-Glass Window Exhibit

Ever want to see some of the Shrine's stained-glass windows up close? Replicas of some of these works of art will be on exhibit in the lower level of the Basilica throughout Advent.

November

30

Handel's Messiah

7:30 p.m.

The Buffalo Philharmonic Chorus returns to the Basilica for its annual presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. Ticket details will be forthcoming.

December

25

Christmas Midnight Mass

12:00 a.m.

Join us for a very special Midnight Mass as we commemorate in a special way the 100th anniversary of the first service ever said within OLV National Shrine & Basilica.

January

3

Kids Night Under the Dome

5:30 p.m.

Calling all kids and families ... join us for a FREE family-friendly evening of carols, activities, and snacks "under the dome."

For information on these events, visit our website, OLVBasilica100.org, or call (716) 828-9444.