

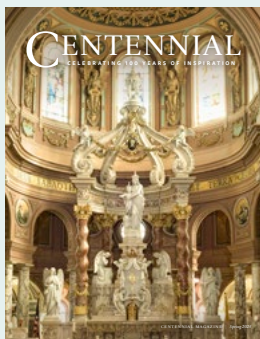
CENTENNIAL

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF INSPIRATION



DEUS SABAOOTH

ET TERRA GLORIA



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The focal point of the Basilica's interior is the sanctuary's Main Altar, and at its center is a nine-foot tall marble statue of the Blessed Mother—personally blessed by Pope Pius XI before being shipped to the U.S.

Centennial magazine is published two times a year by OLV Charities and printed in Western New York. If you would like to submit articles or photos, or if you have ideas for future topics, please call us at (716) 828-9631 or email tlucia@olvcharities.org.

OLVCharities
A Father Baker Legacy

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Today, the light of hope is needed when everything seems in shadows and grief. Hope allows us to enter into the darkness of an uncertain future to journey in the light. It is in this spirit that Pope Francis opened the 2025 jubilee year with the theme of “Pilgrims of Hope.”

“Hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” (Romans 5:1-2,5) The Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. The Spirit keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives in these times of uncertainty, war, violence, natural disasters, loss of jobs, and family struggles.

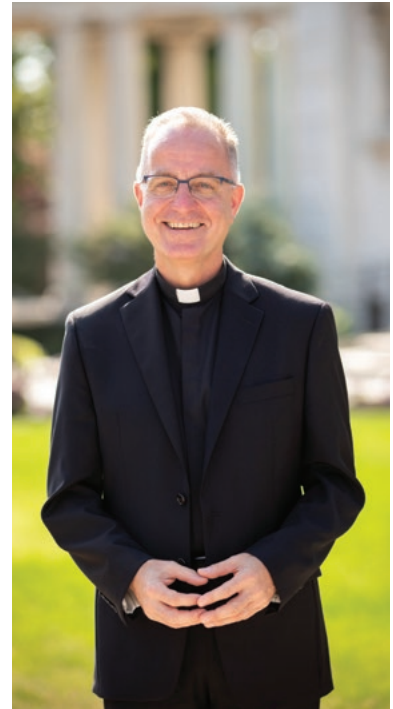
Mentors of hope are needed in today’s world. One person who was just that was Father Nelson Baker. During his ministry, he gave hope to the homeless, to orphans and troubled youth, to the poor in their time of need, and to unwed mothers. He helped individuals gain strength, nurture their faith, and gave them a brighter future. Responding to societal needs, he defended the rights of those who were most vulnerable, opening wide the doors to welcome them, lest anyone ever be robbed of the promise of a better future.

And Father Baker’s legacy of caring continues to this present day as OLV National Shrine & Basilica, OLV Human Services, and OLV Charities respond to the needs of our community through compassionate service. Each organization addresses concerns and develops new programs as needed. And they assist in turning individuals’ challenges into triumphs, giving the gift of hope to all.

In finding hope in God’s grace we are called to discover it in the signs of the times that God gives us. Pope Francis identifies those signs as: desiring world peace, restoring hope to prisoners, showing mercy to the elderly and sick, demonstrating care and concern for the young and the poor, and providing security to migrants. As the baptized, we are responsible for ensuring that manifold signs of light bear witness to God’s presence in the world today.

Through our witness, may we spread hope to all those who anxiously seek it. And may hope find a home in our heart with room to grow so that our life may say to others: “Hope in the Lord!”

May Father Baker guide you in being a “Pilgrim of Hope” and may Our Lady of Victory inspire you!



Gratefully yours in Christ,

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

CEO'S MESSAGE

As is usually the case, Father Baker said it best:

"Our motive is to assist the young mother and her child, which, we feel, has been done most successfully and that we have received God's blessing for doing so."

When he wrote this more than 100 years ago, the humble priest was talking about one of his most important ministries, the OLV Infant Home. And this is exactly the way we, at OLV Charities, feel about our sponsorship of the St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center today.

Founded in 2009 under the auspices of the Diocese of Buffalo, the St. Gianna Center provides pregnant women, new mothers, new fathers, and needy families material, emotional, and spiritual support. It does so through efforts that are truly grass-roots—approximately 50 volunteers staff eight sites throughout the region while compassionate community members provide donated items such as diapers, blankets, clothing, strollers, etc.

In doing so, the St. Gianna Center honors not only Father Baker's legacy of serving mothers and their babies, but our core mission as Catholics: respecting, protecting and cherishing human life.

This partnership couldn't come at a better time. Recent studies indicate that:

- Nearly one third of all births in Western New York are from unintended pregnancies
- Approximately 1,000 babies are born to young women without a high-school diploma each year

Put simply, these mothers need help and the St. Gianna Center is uniquely positioned to help in a very meaningful way.

Both Venerable Nelson Baker and St. Gianna Molla—who was canonized in 2004 after making the ultimate sacrifice in God's name for her newborn daughter—dedicated themselves to serving the most vulnerable members of our community and we are proud and privileged to carry on in their names.

If you'd like more information about our newest ministry, the St. Gianna Center, you can find it on page 16 of this issue of Centennial magazine, or you are welcome to contact its team directly at (716) 828-9654.

Thank you for your dedication to our mission and your desire to continue Father Baker's legacy of caring.



With deepest gratitude,

David J. Kersten
Chief Executive Officer, OLV Charities



A NEW VOICE

{ Perhaps just as beautiful as the sights in the Basilica are the sounds. }

Most are familiar with the powerful sounds of the main organ. This majestic instrument stands 18 feet high in the choir loft with many of its pipes located in the west bell tower. Having lasted for 40+ years, it shouldn't have come as a surprise that the organ failed one day before a January 2023 Mass.

For years, the organ has been patched up with “band aids,” including the addition of 130 new pipes in 2021. But the wear and tear from Daily Masses, funerals, weddings, and special events have taken a toll. Worse, there's no easy solution.

“A major restoration would mean no organ music for at least 9-12 months,” says Peter Gonciarz, Director of Music and Principal Organist at Our Lady of Victory National Shrine & Basilica. “And acquiring a grand piano or an electronic organ would not even be a temporary solution.”

That was when a new idea was hatched. While it may not be the norm in America, it is common for European churches to have two organs. So, after some deliberating, OLV acquired a 1967 20-pipe Gress-Miles organ to serve as the Basilica's second organ. Technician and acclaimed organist Timothy

Smith helped acquire several other sets of pipes with unique voices, and by Christmas of 2024, the new instrument was assembled, tested, and ready.

The console (where the organist sits) is located near the Saint Joseph altar, with cabinetry refinished to match the Shrine's newly restored pews. The state-of-the-art computer system is equipped with an unlimited number of memory levels, allowing for rapid changes in sound, a playback feature and transposers. Its pipes are located above the sacristy.

“The Basilica offers a challenging acoustic with its vast dome and side altars,” Peter explains. “So we had to take great care to ensure each and every pipe makes a musical impact. I hope everyone enjoys the new, rich sound.”

Want to hear the new organ for yourself? It is currently being used at funerals, weddings, Holy Day Masses and Masses with a cantor.

By Jane Rose



A Roadmap for THE FUTURE

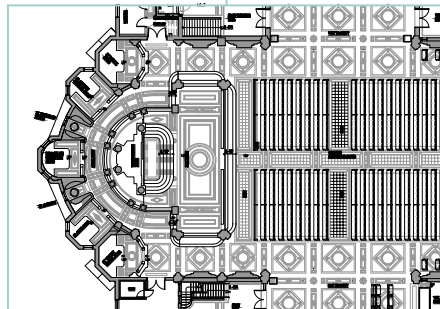
More than 100 years ago, Father Nelson Baker assembled a skilled team to help him build OLV National Shrine & Basilica.

Fast forward to 2021. As OLV's Centennial Celebration began, a new commitment was made by leadership to restore the structure to its original glory. And, as in Father Baker's time, one of the first steps was to convene a restoration committee to guide the process.

Early in the group's tenure, an early challenge to all restoration projects became clear: the lack of original documentation and the absence of cohesive construction plans from restoration projects in the past.

"Documents and renderings were scattered to the four winds. There were scraps of paper, letters, and fragmented pieces of information. There were no meeting minutes or plans that reflected the artists' original vision for the church. So, in essence, we were starting from scratch," remembered David Kersten, CEO of OLV Charities.

The second challenge was understanding the complicated nature of how the Basilica was constructed in the 1920s. To do so—minus documentation from the past—a facilities assessment was carried out by Schneider Architectural Services. This process resulted in detailed digital scans of the



interior to aid in mapping the complex interior and exterior of the Basilica, as well as identifying problem areas.

"This isn't a typical building; it is a detailed work of art," remarked Tom Kujawa, noted restoration architect. "There are small attics, oddly pitched ceilings, narrow entries, and hidden spaces. This isn't the easiest building to assess or inspect."

Augmenting the written assessment was the use of digital photography and drone camera footage. Thousands of images and hours of video footage assist with understanding the church and informing the restoration work.

As the work continues, this "digital roadmap" will not only inform the projects of the 2020s, but those that may be needed in the months, years, and decades ahead.

"The Basilica is woven into the fabric of our region," said David. "Digital resources are critical so the Catholic community, pilgrims, and future visitors will be able to experience the breathtaking grandeur of the Basilica for generations to come."

To learn more about the Basilica's restoration efforts—or to donate—go to OLVBasilica.org.



ON ANGEL'S WINGS

Since its announcement in August of last year, our “Save the Dome, Adopt an Angel” campaign has been well-received. Thanks to you!

As you may remember, the annual freeze-thaw cycle of the Western New York climate has taken its toll on the roof over the past century. If you've been to the Basilica in the last few years, you probably noticed interior damage to plaster and painted artwork due to water infiltration caused by the failing copper dome.

The total cost of replacing it—including the labor and materials necessary to remove the old roof and install a new one—exceeds \$4 million.



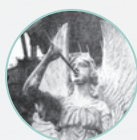
You can still support this effort by making a gift of any size. If you'd like to support the campaign by adopting one of the Shrine's 2,000 angels, please **contact Shannon Donovan** at (716) 828-9610 to discuss your personal gift or pledge over time. To give online, go to saveolddome.org or scan this code with your smartphone.

OLV's Dome by the Numbers



2

When it was finished in 1925, it was the second largest dome in the U.S., behind only the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.



4

Its four signature angels, each measuring 18' tall, herald good news in the compass' four directions—north, south, east, and west



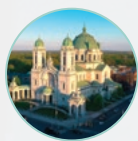
100

The exterior dome's copper is all original, making it 100 years old!



120

Inside the Basilica, the dome is about 120' above the floor and is 80' in diameter



165

The exterior dome reaches 165 feet in the air!



1926

Construction on the Shrine was completed in late 1925 and it was consecrated in May of 1926



2,808

To date, 2,808 donors have supported the Save the Dome campaign, contributing more than \$1.4 million



8,000

Square feet of copper can be found on the dome's exterior



SACRED STORIES IN GLASS

OUR LADY OF VICTORY STAINED GLASS EXHIBIT

Throughout Advent and the Christmas season, a new exhibit drew more than 6,000 people to OLV National Shrine & Basilica and provided an up-close, once-in-a-lifetime look at some of the Basilica's stained-glass windows.

Called "Sacred Stories in Glass," the display featured replicas of some of these works of art so that visitors could truly appreciate their detail—all of the windows featured in the exhibit are located more than 20 feet above the Basilica's floor!

If you missed it during Advent, the stained glass window exhibit will be updated to include different windows throughout the year.



Windows Featured in the Exhibit

1 St. Peter
Receiving
the Keys



2 Wedding
at Cana



3 St. Joseph's
Dream



4 The Holy
Family



5 The Betrothal
of Mary to
St. Joseph



6 The
Annunciation



7 The
Nativity



8 Finding of
Our Lord in
the Temple



9 The Dormition
of the Blessed
Virgin Mary



10 The
Death of
St. Joseph



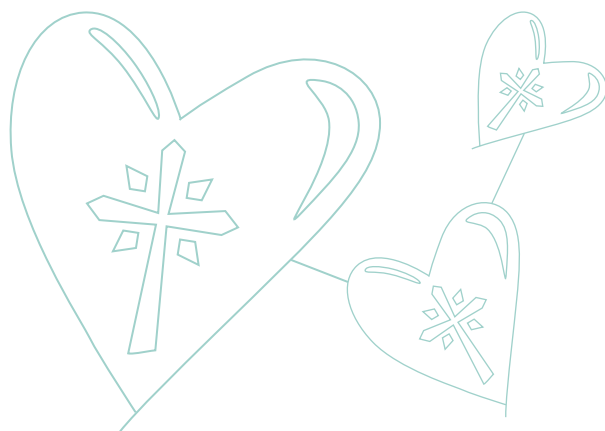
11 Christ
Blessing the
Children



12 Baptism of
Our Lord



ONE OF A KIND



{ OLV Human Services' (OLVHS) Intensive Treatment Program, now known as Victory Learning Center, is a program for children with autism AND a mental health diagnosis. The first of its kind in New York State, the initiative fits OLVHS' reputation for unique programming for kids in need. }

"For most of our students, autism is the primary diagnosis. However, we have students with other disabilities. We have one with Down syndrome. We have others that may have had a traumatic brain injury," explains Lead Principal Trista Kleotzer.

Currently, the Learning Center is housed at two sites: 125 Martin Road for students ranging from ages 11-21 and 650 Ridge Road which is for young people ranging from ages 5-21. The classroom settings at each site provide students with the support they need but couldn't get at his/her home school district. This includes a 6:1:3 class structure, meaning six students to one teacher to three staff. This approach is not only necessary to better support youth but, more often than not, pays off at school and at home.

"We often get feedback from parents that their student's behaviors are reducing at home because they have so much structure in the day and because they're not struggling, they're in the right fit for them as far as schooling goes," Trista says. "Then it's easier on the home side of things because they're



*Trista Kleotzer,
Lead Principal*





learning how to use their coping skills, they're learning how to communicate their frustrations, and things are feeling a little bit easier for them and their families."

In addition to helping students achieve their educational goals, Victory Learning Center also aspires to teach students how to navigate in the community. Young people and families have opportunities to be linked with transition services within OLVHS, such as the WAY Program. Through it, specialists take young people to work sites, teaching them vocational and job skills.

IN HIS FOOTSTEPS

Father Baker was passionate about giving the needy boys and girls in his care a well-rounded education, one that allowed each to attain their highest potential. Of his mission he said: "We will strive to give these children every advantage so they will be able to earn their own way and be a credit to our holy faith."

The teachers and staff of Victory Learning Center are no less passionate, understanding the need to help shape not only better students, but better people. "We focus our teaching around students' interests and needs, asking how can we better engage them in learning. Any idea our staff has, as long as there's a plan for it, we'll do it. As long as outcomes are good, we'll try it. Will the kids better understand lifecycles by having a class lizard? Fine. Who's taking it home on snow days? Where's it going for breaks? Who's going to feed it? Have a plan for it and we can make it happen," a smiling

Trista explains. "It's so rewarding to see the creativity of the educators produce outcomes in the students."

Currently, the program consists of eight classrooms with a population of 72 students and a waiting list of approximately 117! Due to this growing need on the part of both parents and school districts, OLVHS has aggressive plans for expansion, hoping to add nine more classrooms (54 additional students) over the next few years. Such hopes wouldn't be possible without the support of OLV's many benefactors and the hard work and dedication of the program's team members.

"We want people to know we exist and that we're growing," says Trista. "We're doing some pretty great things for these kids and changing lives every day. We want folks out there to be as excited about that as we are!"

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf



A Nod to the Past. AN EYE TO THE FUTURE.



Social Determinants of Health have become a focus of the healthcare community in the U.S. over the last few years. Interestingly, this concept is not new, having emerged early in the 19th century when society saw significant increases in disease and poverty during the Industrial

Revolution. In our region, this

movement led directly to the founding of the institutions that would one day be led by Father Nelson Baker in the 1850s.

The Social Determinants are the non-medical factors that influence a person's health and well-being. They include the conditions in which individuals are born, grow, live, work, and age, as well as the broader forces that shape these conditions. They include:



- **Economic stability:** Income, employment, poverty, access to affordable housing



- **Education:** Access to quality education, literacy levels



- **Healthcare access and quality:** Insurance coverage, access to healthcare providers, cultural competency



- **Neighborhood and built environment:** Safety, access to green space, quality of housing, transportation



- **Social and community context:** Social support, social cohesion, discrimination, violence



- **Policies and laws:** Government policies related to healthcare, education, housing, and employment

I am pleased to report that, at OLV Human Services, most of the above factors are already addressed through our diverse programs for children and families. However, one in particular—healthcare access and quality, especially for young people with complex needs—was an area we felt we could improve upon.

In response, our agency will be partnering with an established pediatric practice that will provide coordinated healthcare for children and teens (ages 0-18) from our facility at 790 Ridge Road (the site of the former Infant Home) in Lackawanna. This addition to our programming will provide a full complement of options for children in need, meaning we can offer medical, mental health, dental, and preventive services under one roof.

Father Baker was well known for identifying and responding to community needs as they arose. In fact, there's no better example of that than the building of the Infant Home. We, at OLV Human Services, are proud to continue this legacy of compassion and innovation to those in need.

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](https://www.olvhs.org).



A REAL VICTORY



Players from both teams warmed up ... jogging, shooting, and stretching. Enthusiastic parents and fans filed into the gym and took their seats. And a playful mascot—a bulldog—made its rounds, taking photos with children and high-fiving adults.

It would seem a common scene. One that plays out countless times in communities throughout the U.S. But, on this night, something was different, exciting, and unique. It was the first interscholastic basketball game in the history of Victory Academy (VA).

Not your average school, VA's students are in grades three through 12 and are diagnosed with emotional or intellectual disabilities or traumatic brain injuries. All have been placed at VA because they cannot receive appropriate schooling from their home district.

Given this, and the fact that most of the students on the team had never played organized sports before, the Bulldogs' gains were never intended to be measured by wins and losses.

"Our primary objective was to teach them things like teamwork, sportsmanship, and responsibility," says Michael

Gunthorp, principal at Victory Academy and the one that pushed for the creation of the squad. "Our goal is not about wins and losses. It's about seeing incremental improvements every week in our students. And if we judge our success on that, then I'm very pleased with what we have seen in this first year."

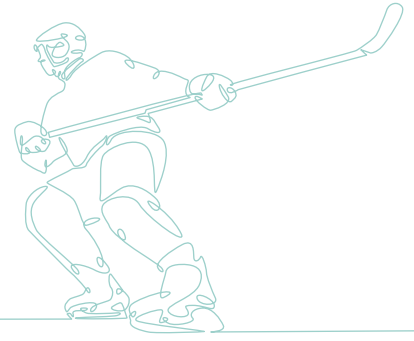
The growth in the players wasn't just noticed on the court. The sense of belonging and those leadership skills learned in the gym have been noticed at home, too.

"I've heard from several parents who have seen a real difference. They tell me the kids are eager to get to school, now, because, maybe for the first time in their lives, they're part of something special," Michael explains.

And, not to be forgotten, thanks have been extended from the team's players, coaches, and staff to the many donors who have contributed to the school's gym, bleachers, and snazzy new uniforms over the years.



Sabres Shoot, OLVHS SCORES!

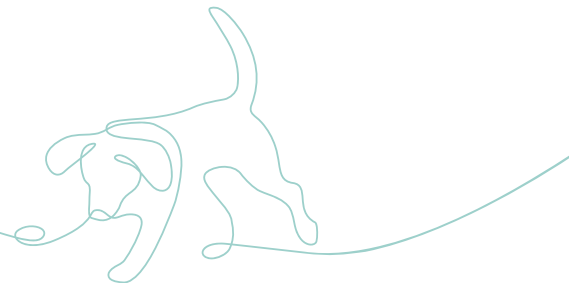


Buffalo Sabres forward JJ Peterka is helping local children stay cozy this winter. In December and January, he hosted “JJ’s Jammie Drive” during which new pairs of pajamas are collected for local families in need. The children of OLV Human Services benefited by receiving \$1,860 in donations and 130 pajamas.

JJ wasn’t the only player lending a hand to our kids. Alex Tuch hosted a group of OLVHS clients in his suite at a recent Sabres game. During the second intermission, everyone headed to the Gold Carpet to fist-bump players before they took the ice. After enjoying a 3-2 win, Alex hosted a brief meet-and-greet for the group, signing autographs and taking pictures.

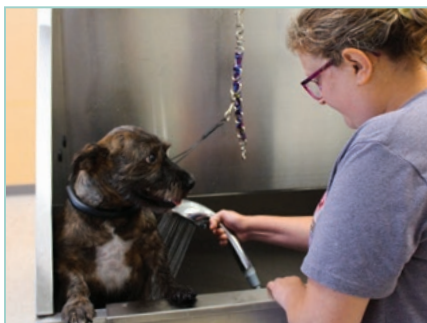


DOG DAYS



Clients participating in OLV Human Services vocational programs now have a new place to get much-needed work experience. Sergeant Sniffers, a doggy daycare and grooming business owned by OLVHS team member Kim Davis, has hosted a number of students.

There, young people take on various jobs like cleaning up after the dogs, bathing and brushing them, and playing fetch.



FATHER BAKER'S LEGACY GROWS



Of all the many things Father Nelson Baker accomplished during his remarkable 60-year ministry, arguably, two stand as the tallest. In no particular order, one is the building of the wondrous OLV National Shrine & Basilica, a monument to the humble priest's devotion to the Blessed Mother. And the other is the construction of the OLV Infant Home.

After reading about horrible acts related to abandoned babies around the turn of the 19th century, Father Baker was called to act. And he did. The Infant Home stood as a sanctuary for young mothers and their newborns well beyond his own lifetime. Its impact on the lives of countless people is, simply, incalculable.

So it should've come as no surprise to many when, in February, OLV Charities, the legacy of Father Baker's

charitable works, became the new organizational sponsor of the St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center (SGPOC).



Its mission of providing care to mothers and babies aligns closely with OLV Charities' (OLVC) ministries, particularly in the shared commitment to serving vulnerable members of society. "Father Baker was a champion of families, mothers, and young people," said David Kersten, OLVC CEO. "It is a privilege to assist the efforts of the Gianna Center as our organization reconnects with an impactful part of Father Baker's saintly works."

The work of SGPOC, much of which has been volunteer-led, has been invaluable to the thousands of individuals it has served over the past 15 years as an outreach program of the Office of Pro-Life Ministry of the Diocese of Buffalo. Led by newly

appointed director Sarah Lindstrom, approximately 50 volunteers keep eight outreach centers alive, providing assistance to those in need in locations such as Buffalo,

Cheektowaga, Lackawanna, Niagara Falls, Olean, Fredonia, Perry, and Holley. The organization's mission is to uphold the value and sanctity of human life by aiding pregnant women, new mothers, new fathers, and families in need through material, emotional, and spiritual support.

"In addition to giving moms and families material items like diapers, wipes or clothing, we want to minister to them as well," Sarah says. "What brings me the most joy is knowing that someone is leaving feeling better than when they came in. When I am sitting with a mom who is telling me she wouldn't know what she'd do without us, I know I have the opportunity to show her the love of Jesus. It's such a gift."

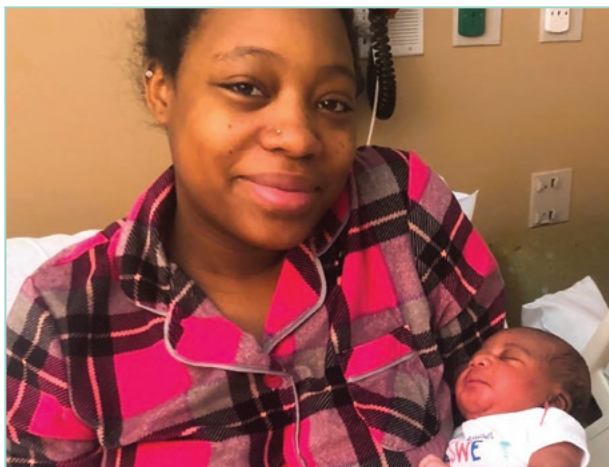
A SAINTLY WORK

The Centers bear the name of St. Gianna Beretta Molla, an Italian pediatrician and a devout Catholic best known for her unwavering faith. During her fourth pregnancy in 1961, Gianna was diagnosed with a fibroma in her uterus. The doctors gave her three options: abortion, a hysterectomy, or removal of only the tumor. Understanding the risks, she chose the third option, prioritizing the life of her unborn child. Gianna gave birth to a healthy daughter, Gianna Emanuela, on April 21, 1961, but died a week later. She was beatified in 1994 and canonized on May 16, 2004, as the patron of mothers, physicians, and unborn children. Her feast day is celebrated on April 28.

"Gianna Beretta Molla was a simple but significant messenger of divine love. Following the example of Christ, who 'having loved his own ... loved them to the end,' this holy mother remained heroically faithful to the commitment she made on the day of her marriage," read Pope John Paul II's homily from her canonization ceremony. "The extreme sacrifice she sealed with her life testifies that only those who have the courage to give of themselves totally to God and to others are able to fulfill themselves."

WANT TO LEND A HAND?

As a grass-roots ministry, the Center depends on the generosity of compassionate souls. Donations of items such as clothing, diapers, baby wipes, bottles, bibs, and financial support is always welcome! And, if individuals would like to join the ranks of the St. Gianna volunteers, they would be welcomed. For more information, visit stgiannaoutreach.org or scan this code with your smartphone.



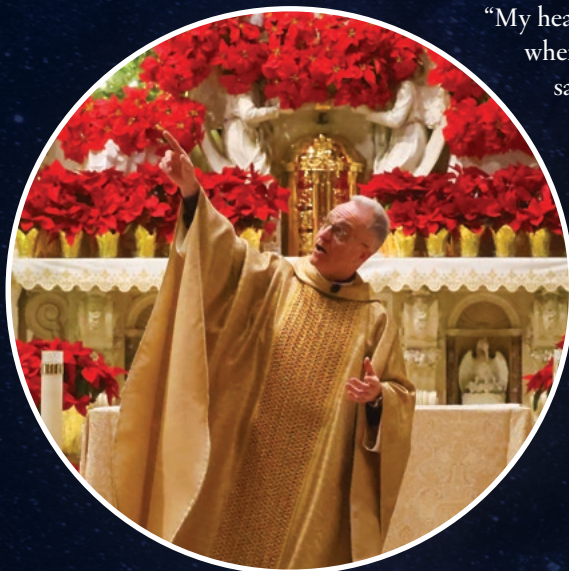
By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf

KIDS NIGHT ✨ UNDER THE DOME ✨ RECAP

FAMILY FUN ... UNDER THE DOME

More than 600 children, parents and grandparents filed into OLV National Shrine & Basilica on January 4 for a special evening of prayer, song, sight-seeing, and crafts.

Our Second Annual Kids Under the Dome event was a huge success and featured carols, a re-enactment of the Epiphany, an “I Spy” game on the Basilica’s dome, refreshments, and tons of arts and crafts in the lower level. The best part is it was all free!



“My heart was so happy when I looked out and saw more than 600 happy faces smiling back to me,” says Msgr. David LiPuma, pastor/rector of the Shrine. “It was a vibrant and energetic night, not only for the families, but for the Basilica. It’s so nice to see so many young people enjoying themselves and making memories.”



Scan this code with your phone to see photos and video from the event.







CAMP TURNER

A Ministry of OLV Charities

POSTCARDS FROM CAMP...



CAMP TURNER EARNS PRAISE

It was another offseason of accomplishments for Camp Turner as it earned accreditation from the American Camp Association (ACA) for the first time in its 100+ year history.

In doing so, Camp Turner was lauded for its excellence in overall camp operation, particularly its program quality and ability to safeguard the health and safety of its campers and staff.

"Being accredited by the ACA is a great accomplishment and speaks to the quality of our camp and the excellence of our team," says Camp Director John Mann. "It ensures that others know what we already do: that Camp Turner is a safe, fun place for young people to grow in their appreciation of themselves, their peers, and their faith."



REGISTER TODAY

Since 1923, Camp Turner has provided countless thousands of young people with summer memories to last a lifetime and the 2025 Season looks to be no different. After 2024 saw more than 500 campers take to its beautiful grounds tucked into the picturesque Allegany State Park, this year's registration opened with a bang in January!

To reserve a spot or for more information on the camp and its many benefits for kids and teenagers, visit campturner.org.

SUMMER JOB = GROWTH!

Know a young adult who loves the outdoors and working with children? Then consider spending the summer working at Camp Turner. Every year, our counselors develop and practice valuable real-world skills such as responsibility, teamwork, selflessness, leadership, problem solving and more. All while having fun and developing close bonds with co-workers.

To learn more about summer job opportunities at Camp Turner, visit campturner.com/employment.



A Day to REMEMBER

{ More than 130 people braved the Western New York cold and wind to enjoy an inspirational afternoon in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., at OLV National Shrine & Basilica on Monday, January 20. }

Put together by community activist John Ingram, the memorial celebration featured remarks by OLV's Msgr. David LiPuma, Pastor Mark Blue of Second Baptist Church, and Pastor Keith Mobley of Mount Olive Baptist Church. Several elected officials were on hand to pay their respects as well, including Lackawanna Mayor Annette Iafallo, State Senator April Baskin, and the event's keynote speaker, Majority Leader of the New York State Assembly, Crystal Peoples-Stokes, whose stirring speech brought the house down!

One of the highlights of the day included the recitation of the landmark "I Have a Dream" speech by young people from the different congregations.



And another was the uplifting soundtrack of the service—which included favorites such as "Lift Every Voice and Sing," "Glory," and "America the Beautiful"—provided by a combined choir made up of talented performers from several different WNY church groups, among them OLV, Mount Olive, and Second Baptist.

"I was so honored to be a part of this prayer service that served not only as a tribute to Dr. King, a pivotal figure in American history, but as a reminder of the ongoing need for collective action in the fight against inequality," Msgr. LiPuma says. "The speeches were incredible, the young people were brilliant, and the music was such an inspiration. I cannot wait for next year's event!"

A JOYFUL

OLV National Shrine & Basilica proudly opened its doors to a standing-room-only crowd on September 29 for a special concert in honor of its Centennial Celebration. That day, JoAnn Falletta led the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra for a performance that attendees won't soon forget!

The concert's program was specially curated by Ms. Falletta, who wanted each musical selection to reflect the occasion of the Basilica's anniversary.



L NOISE





To Nick Knab, it's all about mission. Whether in his role as president, CEO and co-founder of OneBridge Benefits, or while serving as a volunteer at OLV alongside his wife, Sherri. Living a purpose-driven life is what it's all about.

"I have been blessed and I realize that," he says. "I've been blessed in different ways and in my role as a volunteer or as a business-owner, I am committed to passing those blessings on to those in need or have challenges. If I can do it, myself, as a volunteer or OneBridge can do it as a company, we can elevate everyone."

Nick and Sherri co-chaired the Victory Nite event last fall that was a tremendous success. Currently, he is serving as the 2025 corporate division vice-chair for the local Catholic Charities appeal.



A FAMILY AFFAIR

His involvement on OLV's campus these days probably makes sense for someone who, seemingly, grew up around Father Baker's legacy of caring. His uncle, Rick Heist, was the former Executive Director of OLV Charities and Nick's father, who is in construction, was often in Lackawanna working on the "City of Charity's" many buildings. More times than he could count, Nick tagged along, helping with whatever needed to be done. But, as he got older, OLV just seemed to keep dropping into his life.

"As I moved into my 20s, my father would sponsor the Friends of Father Baker Reception each fall, so I started to attend that event each year," recalls Nick. "Then when I got to be in my late 20s/early 30s, that's when I got the call to start giving back. And that's when, I will say, I dug in a little bit more to understand the mission of OLV—the mission of helping others better themselves. It's an easy one to buy into and it just became easier and easier for me to get involved."

A SHARED PASSION

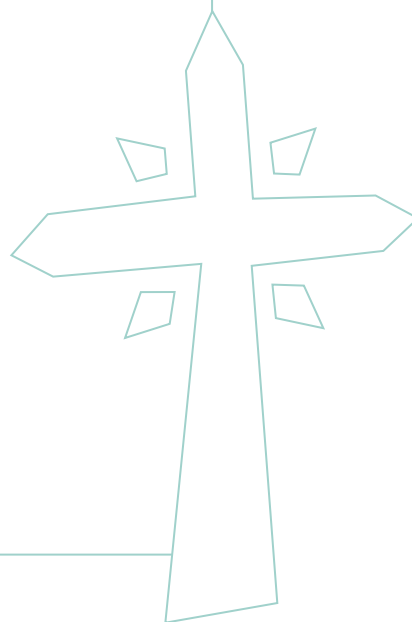
When asked, Nick is quick to point out that his "mission mindedness" is not confined to just him, his family or co-workers. He remains in awe of the compassionate team members that live the mission of Father Baker's ministry each and every day.

"I can talk about passion for mission a long time. For me, though, what does that mean? As a business owner, maybe it's giving money a few times a year or serving on a board and attending a few meetings. But mission is what the folks who work here at OLV do every day. That's mission," he says. "Few people take time to acknowledge those who are willing and have the talent needed to change the course of the lives of those in need the way they do. They're doing it with passion. It's not for money. It's for the fulfillment they're getting out of making a difference. That's what excites me!"

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf



Nick at OLV Charities' annual Victory Nite event.



A Special NITE!

On September 26, OLV Charities hosted its most successful Victory Nite event to date at Rich's Atrium, welcoming a record 480 guests for an evening of generosity, celebration, and community spirit. Thanks to the incredible support of our sponsors, donors, and attendees, the event raised more than \$360,000 to further Father Baker's mission.

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of the Father Baker Legacy Award, which honors individuals who exemplify our founder's dedication to improving the lives of others. Last year, we proudly recognized two remarkable individuals: Pastor James Giles, founder of Back to Basics Ministries and Jerry Sheldon, founding member and president of the Buffalo Chapter of Sleep in Heavenly Peace.

Victory Nite 2024 was a testament to the power of giving and the strength of our community. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to making this event such a remarkable success. Your generosity allows OLV Charities and OLV Human Services to continue their mission of providing hope and essential services to those who need it most.

As we look ahead to Victory Nite 2025 on Thursday, September 18, we are excited to welcome Carl (CJ) & Kelly Montante, III as our chair couple!

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Know someone who creates a lasting impact on our community? Please consider nominating him or her for the Father Baker Legacy Awards. Our past honorees embody Father Baker's legacy of compassion, commitment, and selflessness, working tirelessly to improve the lives of others.



If you know a deserving person, please visit OLVCharities.org/nominations to submit a nomination today. You can also scan this code with your smartphone.

By Shannon Donovan



GREETINGS FROM *Florida*

OLV Charities' leadership made a visit to Florida this past March to connect with some of our wonderful friends & benefactors.





{ Part 3 }

In the early 1900's, as Father Baker was entering his 60s, the organization continued to grow in size, so much so that, locally, it became known as a "City of Charity."

Moved to action after reading about the bones of abandoned infants being dredged out of the Erie Canal, Father Baker began construction of OLV Infant Home in 1907. One year later it opened and was immediately filled to capacity with babies and mothers. It's operational motto, "no one is turned away," served as an inspirational one to the countless lives that would be saved by this beloved institution.

The growth and evolution of the Infant Home led to the next large-scale project, the addition of a maternity hospital and a nursing school in 1919. Years later, as the community's needs changed, it would switch gears to serve the region as a general hospital.



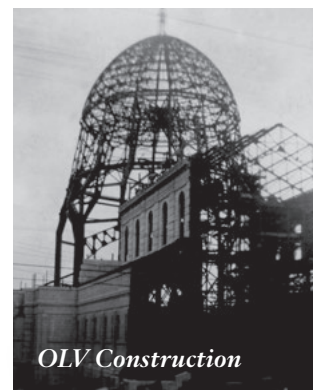
For years, Father Baker dreamed of one last project. A Shrine that would serve as fitting tribute to his patroness, Our Lady of Victory. A destructive fire at the campus' parish church, St. Patrick's, in 1919 gave him the opportunity he long sought. And, in 1921, at the age of 79, he assembled a team, led by renowned architect Emile Uhlich, charged with designing and building what we know today as OLV National Shrine & Basilica. Built—and fully paid for—in just five years it was consecrated in 1926 and, ever since, has become known as the jewel of Father Baker's "City of Charity."

Tired but still committed to serving others, even into his 80s, Father Baker's institutions were a beacon of hope during the Great Depression. The boys in his care made and distributed meals, clothing and shoes. The buildings of his campus offered lodging. And his hospital provided free medical care. These heroic acts of charity caused him to rightfully earn the nickname "Padre of the Poor" in newspaper accounts of the day.

Eventually, though, age caught up with Father Baker who died on July 29, 1936, at the age of 94. Over the next few days, it is estimated that more than 500,000 people paid their respects to the beloved priest.

His story did not end there, though. In 1987, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome opened Father Baker's case for canonization. Twelve years later, upon a recommendation from the Vatican, his earthly remains were transferred into his beloved OLV Basilica. And, in 2011, he was named Venerable, opening the door to the current step of beatification, the third of four steps in the sainthood process.

In addition, his legacy of compassionate care for the community's most vulnerable members continues to flourish to this day.



OLV HUMAN SERVICES

The work done with children and families at the orphanage, protectory and Infant Home have evolved into OLV Human Services (OLVHS). The care-giving arm of the OLV organizations, OLVHS is known as a leader in behavioral health care throughout the region. Today, the agency serves between 10,000 and 12,000 children, adults, and families each year through a wide range of educational, clinical, home-based, and residential programs. For more information, go to OLVHS.org.

OLV NATIONAL SHRINE & BASILICA

Each year, it is estimated that nearly 300,000 visits are made through the five doors of OLV National Shrine & Basilica. The European-style church is an architectural wonder and serves as the final resting place of Father Baker. It is also the home base for a thriving parish community and OLV Elementary School, a PK-8 school. For more information, go to OLVBasilica.org.

OLV CHARITIES

A direct descendant of Father Baker's pioneering programs, OLV Charities (OLVC) serves as the "story-telling and fundraising arm" of the OLV organizations. Each year, its team members collaborate with benefactors and friends to raise funds to promote devotion to the Blessed Mother and support OLV Human Services, OLV National Shrine & Basilica, Camp Turner, the St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center, and Venerable Nelson Baker's Cause for Canonization. For information, go to OLVCharities.org.



This concludes our three-part series on the incredible life of Venerable Nelson Baker. As it's difficult to summarize such an accomplished man in only 2,000 words, we welcome you to learn more at fatherbaker.org or scan the qr code.





A Lifetime of MEMORIES

Countless memories will bring former OLV Charities and OLV Human Services (OLVHS) team member Dawn Hewitt happiness in her retirement after a 38-year career that ended on December 31, 2024.

Like many others, Dawn started her job hunt after college graduation in the mid-1980s. After seeing an opening at OLVHS (known as Baker Victory Services then), she applied and was hired. Shortly after starting, however, Dawn wasn't sure she was cut-out for it and decided to give the job six months.

"I had a business degree and a minor in psychology, so I wasn't sure I could work with the kids. But I kept with it," she remembers. "That six-month mark passed a few times over and, before you knew it, it was 38 years later!"

In her nearly 20 years at OLVHS, Dawn moved around the organization, but never too far from its young clients. She worked in one of the agency's schools, in its group homes and RTF (Residential Treatment Facility). She also took roles within the recreation department, scheduling activities for young people, and the preventive services program that aims to keep struggling families together. But another leap of faith was just ahead ...

"In 2006, a position opened up with the Homes of Charity (now known as OLV Charities) and, even though I had not been directly involved in fundraising before, I was excited. I had first-hand experience dealing with clients and watching the kids improve and grow, so telling these stories to donors seemed like it could be fun," says Dawn.

Always relishing a challenge, about 10 years later, she was called upon to kickstart OLV's e-philanthropy (electronic giving) program and was important to the organizations' initial foray into social media. She went part-time in December of 2023 and retired one year later.

Given the diverse nature of her experiences throughout campus, Dawn touched many, many lives. And it's her co-workers she'll miss the most. When asked about a particular memory, she told the following story.

"I think it was my second or third day in the hospital after getting COVID-19 in the early days of the pandemic and things were not looking good. I was just going in for a CAT scan on my lungs as the doctors thought I had blood clots. I received a work email just as I was preparing myself. It included a link. I clicked it and it was a video that all of the staff had put together for me, wishing me well," recalls Dawn. "Seeing it really meant a lot to me. It got me fighting and I realized how important my teammates were to me. I'll never forget that."

While in retirement, Dawn hopes to travel more—especially to Walt Disney World—and to spend more time with family. We are deeply grateful for her incredible service, unwavering commitment, and positive attitude which have been a cornerstone of OLV for so long. Please join us in praying for Dawn to have abundant blessings and much joy in the days ahead.

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf

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.

June

8

Dedication of Chancel Organ & Prayer Intention Wall

Join us for a special celebration on June 8, immediately following Noon Mass, to dedicate the chancel organ and a new addition to the Basilica, the Father Baker Prayer Intention Wall, a custom, hand-carved piece by our own Jon Trabucco.

July

26-27

Father Baker Weekend

Mark your calendars for Father Baker Weekend! This year's activities will include our Jazz Mass, Father Baker Day, and, of course, our Pennies to Heaven fundraiser and family carnival. Details will be coming soon, stay tuned to OLVBasilica.org.

July-
August

Camp Turner 2025 Summer Season

The 2025 camping season is almost here and sessions are filling up quickly! To reserve a spot today, or to find out more about the camp and its many benefits for kids and teenagers, visit campturner.org.

September

18

Victory Nite 2025

OLV's signature event, the Victory Nite gala is set for September 18 at 6 p.m. Join us for a night of food, fun, and paying tribute to those who, like Father Baker, serve the neediest individuals in our community. For more details, check out OLVCharities.org/victorynite.

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