

CENTENNIAL

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF INSPIRATION





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A Father Baker Legacy

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About the Cover:

This photo was taken during Centennial Weekend in May. The two-day celebration marked the 100th anniversary of the Basilica's consecration and served as the culmination of its five-year Centennial Celebration.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

At the end of May, we celebrated the 100th Anniversary of the consecration of OLV National Shrine & Basilica, officially concluding our five-year Centennial Celebration. And what an amazing five years it has been!

Parishioners, donors, and friends, my heart is full of deep gratitude for your abundant generosity during our five-year centennial campaign to restore the dome and the interior of the Basilica, Father Baker's "Crown Jewel."

Thank you for believing in our dream. Thank you for your partnership which transformed our vision into reality. None of this would have been possible without YOU!

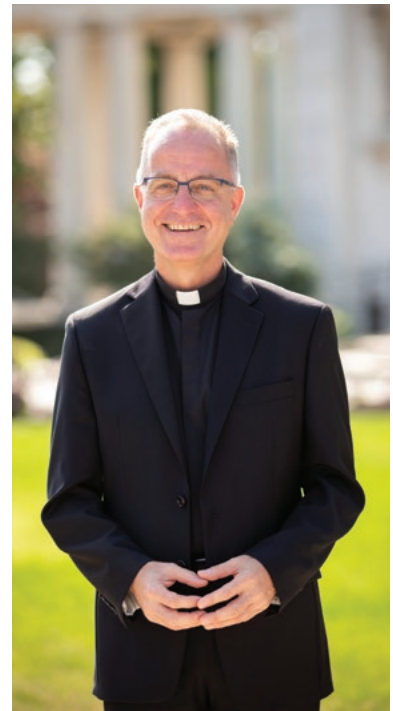
As you know, the exterior and interior restoration work—which included repairing the roof and drainage system, replacing the copper dome (which is still in process), restoring the pews to their original beauty, refurbishing the marble floors, plaster repair and painting, repairing, sealing and repainting the stained-glass windows, and lighting enhancements—was extensive.

All who worked on these projects did an amazing job! I'm profoundly grateful for their skill, talent, and expertise in restoring this sacred space to the breathtaking magnificence when Father Baker built it. Their work has given renewed beauty and tribute to Our Lady of Victory, ensuring that the Basilica's sacred space will inspire all who enter it for generations to come. And I genuinely believe that as Father Nelson Baker looks at the Basilica's restoration, he is indeed smiling down on us!

I invite you to come and see the renewed beauty throughout this magnificent sacred worship space. Join me in giving honor to Our Lady of Victory and gratitude to Father Baker for his vision to construct this majestic edifice.

Please know that I thank God whenever I think of you; and every time I pray for all of you, I pray with joy, remembering how you have helped to restore this magnificent treasure. (Adapted Phil. 1: 4-5.)

May Father Baker intercede for you and may Our Lady of Victory protect you and your loved ones! God bless you!



Gratefully yours in Christ,

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

CEO'S MESSAGE

On May 31, 2026, the OLV community officially concluded its five-year Centennial Celebration, a journey guided from the very beginning by the theme *All Are Welcome*.

In that time, more than one million individuals were drawn to the inspiring and enduring legacy of Venerable Nelson Baker: his lifelong care for those in need and his “Crown Jewel,” OLV National Shrine & Basilica.

One of the distinct honors of my professional life has been to serve on the Basilica Restoration Committee alongside our Pastor and Rector, Rev. Msgr. David LiPuma, and a remarkable group of architects, construction managers, finance and fundraising professionals, and the many skilled tradesmen and women and artisans who advised us along the way.



From the outset, we understood that we were not simply repairing an architectural artifact. We were working inside a living, breathing space that holds so much of the human experience within its sacred walls. Not just daily liturgies, but deeply personal memories: weddings, baptisms, funerals, quiet prayers whispered in an empty pew. Every day, this holy place welcomes the curious and the sorrowful, the hopeful and the heartbroken. It is, in every sense, a sanctuary for all.

And somewhere along the way, something unexpected happened. We came to understand that we were not working for the present

moment, but for future generations. We had to listen to this grand structure. And in time, we discovered that in some quiet, grace-filled way, we were being healed through our work.

Re-equipping its musical instruments. Retraining its light. Strengthening the magnificent stained glass that transforms sunlight into color and story. Drawing new attention to its murals of heaven and salvation—images that have reminded generations of visitors of Father Baker’s dream, his faith, his inexhaustible hope for humanity.

As we close this Centennial chapter, this holy place is already asking its next great question: *For the next 100 years, how will we bring compassion, hope, and courage to others?* I, for one, cannot wait to find out!

With deepest gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David J. Kersten". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David J. Kersten
Chief Executive Officer, OLV Charities



{ Honoring the Craftspeople Behind the Basilica's Restoration }

The Basilica recently welcomed many of the skilled artisans, contractors, and restoration professionals whose work has helped preserve one of Western New York's most treasured sacred landmarks.

The Restoration Partners Reception, held May 6, provided an opportunity to express heartfelt gratitude to the dozens of firms whose expertise and dedication have transformed the Basilica over the past five years.

From the restoration of gutters, floors and pews to

intricate plaster and decorative painting work, and from the refurbishment of stained-glass windows to countless other preservation efforts, each project has played an important role in safeguarding the Basilica's beauty and legacy.

"The skill, dedication, and pride demonstrated by these men and women have been extraordinary," said Father David LiPuma. "Their craftsmanship honors Father Baker's legacy and helps ensure that this sacred place will inspire generations to come."

Polishing the Crown JEWEL

Over the past five years, the Basilica has entered a remarkable era of renewal, restoring both its physical structure and its spiritual radiance as it begins its second century.

2022

DRAINAGE SYSTEM

Beginning in 2022, the Basilica completed a major drainage system replacement and repair project, correcting longstanding water issues and protecting the Shrine's structure.



ROOF

Work began in 2022 on replacing failing copper-roof sections and repairing gutters, with the goal of preventing interior water damage.

COMMUNITY ROOMS

The restoration of the Basilica's lower-level community rooms created welcoming spaces for ministries, meetings, events, and community groups.



STAINED-GLASS

A multi-year effort got underway to restore all of the Basilica's 100+ stained-glass windows, including the repair and replacement of deteriorating century-old frames.



2023

PEW & FLOOR

Beginning in early 2023, a comprehensive pew and marble floor restoration program got underway, refinishing the original pews, restoring flooring, and renewing the Basilica's beauty.





2024

DOME

Beginning in 2024 and continuing through 2027, the Shrine's copper dome restoration project is preserving the Shrine, strengthening its structure and safeguarding its beauty.



2025



ELEVATOR

The installation of a state-of-the-art elevator in the spring of 2025 replaced a failing unit, significantly improving accessibility, safety and reliability.



PAINTING & PLASTER

Beginning in 2025 and completed in spring 2026, OLV National Shrine & Basilica underwent a major interior restoration, stabilizing damaged plaster, revealing hidden architectural details, and restoring its original color palette.



FATHER BAKER SHRINE & CHANCEL ORGAN INSTALLATION

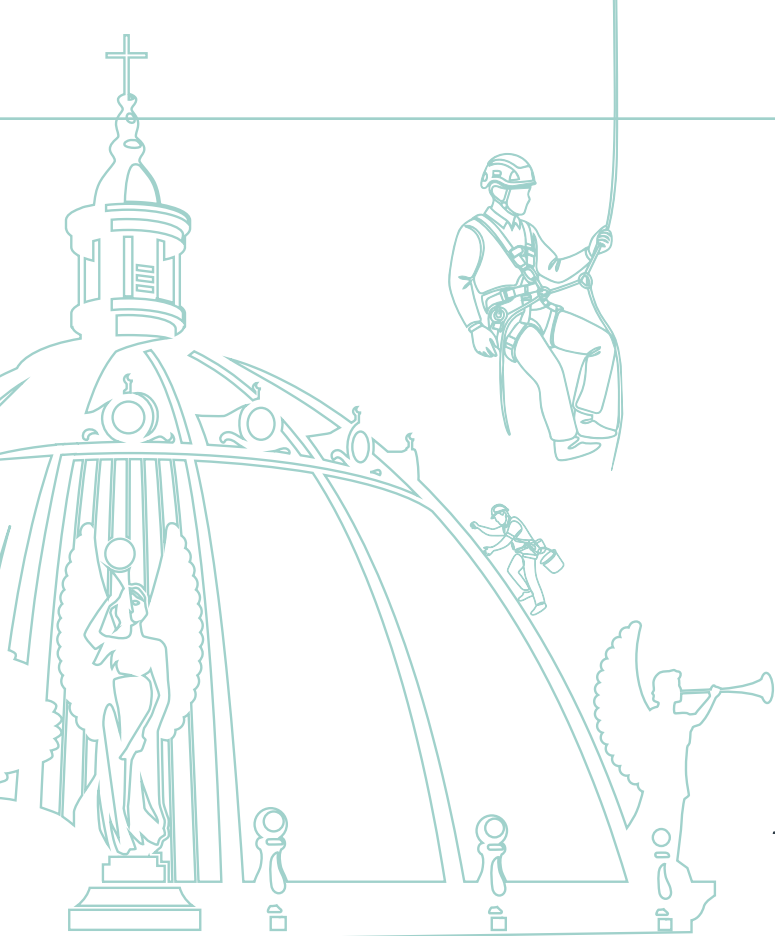
In June 2025, the new Father Baker Shrine and chancel organ were dedicated, donor-funded additions that enhance the sights and sounds of the Basilica's interior.



LIGHTING

Beginning in late 2025 and completed in spring 2026, the Basilica's lighting restoration work illuminated its dome, art and architecture.





DOME SWEET DOME

Dome Restoration Work Continues



For nearly a century, OLV's magnificent copper dome has defined the local skyline. Completed in 1925, its 80-foot diameter made it the second largest dome in the United States at the time, smaller only than the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. For 100 years, it has withstood relentless lake-effect winds, driving rain, snow, and ice.

But time and weather have taken their toll.

Originally constructed with 16-ounce copper sheeting, many sections have thinned to the point where patches can no longer be soldered. Simple repairs are no longer possible. To ensure the Shrine's future, comprehensive dome restoration work continues.



The new copper roofing being installed is a heavier, more durable 20-ounce sheeting that is engineered to endure another century of Western New York winters. By the end of 2025, seven of the dome's 16 copper bays had been opened and protected. By the close of 2026, all 16 bays will be replaced, and two of the majestic angels surrounding the dome will be cleaned and repaired. In 2027, the cupola will be removed and replaced, the remaining angels restored, and scaffolding finally taken down.

A WELCOME PROJECT



With the copper dome of OLV National Shrine & Basilica now fully funded for replacement—thanks to your extraordinary generosity and a transformational \$1.2 million investment from New York State—an exciting new chapter can begin.

More than 280,000 visitors each year come to the Shrine seeking hope, beauty, and inspiration. Yet more than 65% enter through the southeast entrance, a space never designed for such volume. Limited accessibility, unclear wayfinding, and traffic challenges mean that the first impression of this sacred place does not reflect its historic and spiritual significance.

That is about to change.

Plans are underway to create a welcoming new plaza that will transform how pilgrims, parishioners, and guests arrive. From the moment visitors turn onto campus, they will experience improved traffic flow, safer bus and vehicle access, expanded and ADA-accessible parking, enhanced lighting and landscaping, and clear signage to guide them with confidence.

At the heart of the plaza will stand a statue honoring Father Baker, inviting visitors to encounter his remarkable legacy. New signage will also lead guests to his final resting place and his museum, allowing them the chance to deepen their understanding of his life and ministry.

This Welcome Plaza is more than an infrastructure project ... it is a statement of hospitality. Together, we can ensure that every arrival reflects the dignity, beauty, and spirit of this national shrine for generations to come.



Scan this QR code to learn more and support this much-needed project!





AN EVENING TO REMEMBER



The Basilica Centennial Gala, held on May 30, was a spectacular evening of celebration, reflection, and gratitude, bringing together hundreds of supporters at the Historic Statler Ballroom to honor 100 years of faith, fellowship, and service.

Guests enjoyed an elegant night featuring inspiring remarks from Father David and Bishop Michael Fisher, while emcee Kevin Keenan guided the program with warmth and enthusiasm. Live music, fine dining, and dancing created a festive atmosphere as attendees celebrated the Basilica's rich past and enduring legacy.

One of the evening's most memorable elements was a series of dramatic readings that brought key moments from the Shrine's

history to life. In addition, students from OLV Elementary School dressed as "Baker Boys" and mingled with guests throughout the evening, serving as a living reminder of the Basilica's deep connection to Father Nelson Baker and the generations of people whose lives have been impacted by his ministry.

The gala kicked off Centennial Weekend and served as a fitting tribute to the Shrine's century-long mission of bringing people together in faith, community, and hope. The packed ballroom reflected the tremendous support and affection the Basilica continues to inspire throughout WNY and beyond.

A huge thanks goes to all those who served on our planning committee, our co-chairs Beth and Joe Ieraci and Jeanne and Jeff Magavern, as well as our honorary chair, Helene Russo.





CENTENNIAL MASS & RECEPTION CLOSE HISTORIC CELEBRATION

The Basilica's five-year Centennial Celebration came to a meaningful close on May 31 with a special Mass and reception.

The Mass commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Basilica's consecration in May 1926, offering a prayerful tribute to a century of faith. Bishop Michael Fisher delivered an inspiring homily, reflecting on the Basilica's enduring spiritual significance and the generations of people who have found hope and belonging within its walls. Several clergy members and women religious were also present, adding to the solemnity and historic importance of the occasion.

Following Mass, the celebration continued with a packed reception filled with well-wishers, food, live music, and fellowship. Students dressed as the beloved "Baker Boys" greeted guests, while an antique vehicle—generously lent by the Basil Automotive Group—added a nostalgic touch to the festivities.

Together, the Mass and reception provided a joyful and fitting conclusion to Centennial Weekend. As the Basilica honored 100 years since its consecration, the day served as a powerful reminder of its lasting legacy of welcome and community.



ALL ARE W

The Basilica's Centennial Celebration has been a remarkable five-year journey honoring its rich history while renewing its role as a vibrant center of faith and community. Marking the 100th anniversary of the Basilica's cornerstone blessing in 1921 and its consecration in 1926, the celebration served as both a tribute to the past and an invitation to the future.

Centered on the theme "*All Are Welcome*," the Centennial encouraged people to return, rediscover, and experience the Basilica in new ways. Since the 2021 rededication of the cornerstone, the Shrine has hosted concerts, art exhibits, Masses, conferences, and special events that welcomed diverse audiences.

The response has been extraordinary, with an estimated 1.3 million visitors and pilgrims passing through its doors.

"The Centennial Celebration has truly breathed new life into the OLV community," said Father David. "It has reaffirmed the Shrine as a place of worship and inspiration, welcoming all to experience its beauty, history, and sense of belonging."



SEPTEMBER 2024 &
OCTOBER 2022
*Buffalo Philharmonic
Orchestra Concerts*



2021-2023
*Organ Recital
Series*



2023-2025
*Kids Night
Under the
Dome*



NOVEMBER 2023
Saint John's Bible Exhibit



JULY 2024
*Visit from Gianna
Emanuela Molla*



AUGUST 2021
*Rededication of
Cornerstone*

WELCOME



2022-2025
*Paint the Basilica
Events*



JUNE 2025
*Father Baker Shrine
Dedication*



MAY 2026
Centennial Weekend



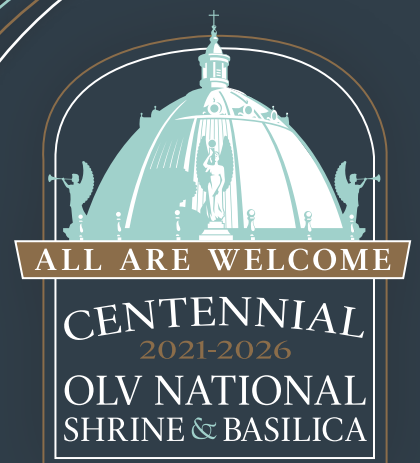
2024-2025
*Stained-Glass Window
Exhibit*



2024-2025
*Nativity Set
Exhibit*



AUGUST 2024
*Centennial Campaign
Kick-Off*





INSPIRED BY A LANDMARK

What began as a simple invitation in 2022 has grown into one of the Basilica's most beloved traditions.

For the last few years, OLV's Paint the Basilica events have invited artists of all skill levels to create their own interpretation of the Shrine. Each year, artists gather throughout campus with brushes, easels, and palettes in hand, capturing both classic and unexpected views of the Basilica's majestic architecture.

Award-winning artist and West Seneca Art Society founder Bernice Smith was among the first to participate. Drawn by the Basilica's beauty, history, and spiritual atmosphere, she found the experience both artistically challenging and deeply meaningful.

"The greatest joy comes from painting itself," said Smith, who has returned each year and even helped organize the event alongside OLV staff. In fact, her vibrant interpretation of the Basilica appeared on the cover of the Fall 2022 *Centennial* magazine.



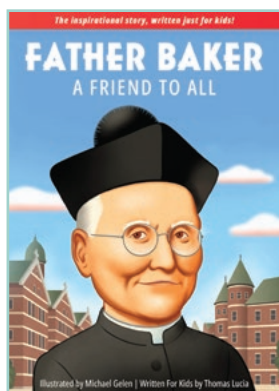
For Orchard Park artist Dennis Andrukat, painting has been a lifelong passion. "God gives me the talent, and so I need to give it back," he said. Since joining Paint Out three years ago, he has painted the Basilica from different perspectives each year, inspired by Father Baker's vision and determination. In 2025, his work earned a first-place ribbon!

The tradition continued this year in June, when artists once again gathered to paint the Basilica's exterior and, for a special session, its stunning interior. Their work not only celebrates the Shrine's architectural beauty but also helps tell the story of a place where art, history, faith, and community come together.

Years later, Paint the Basilica artwork can be found throughout the community, in homes, and around OLV's campus itself—a lasting reminder of the creativity and inspiration this sacred landmark continues to inspire.

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, of

A HERO & Friend



The children of Western New York have a new hero to discover: Father Nelson Baker!

In early March, OLV Charities released “Father Baker: A Friend to All,” a fully illustrated young readers’ biography designed especially for ages 8–12. With about 80 pages of vibrant storytelling and eye-catching illustrations, the book introduces students to the life, faith, and

incredible accomplishments of the beloved priest known for his lifelong dedication to those in need.

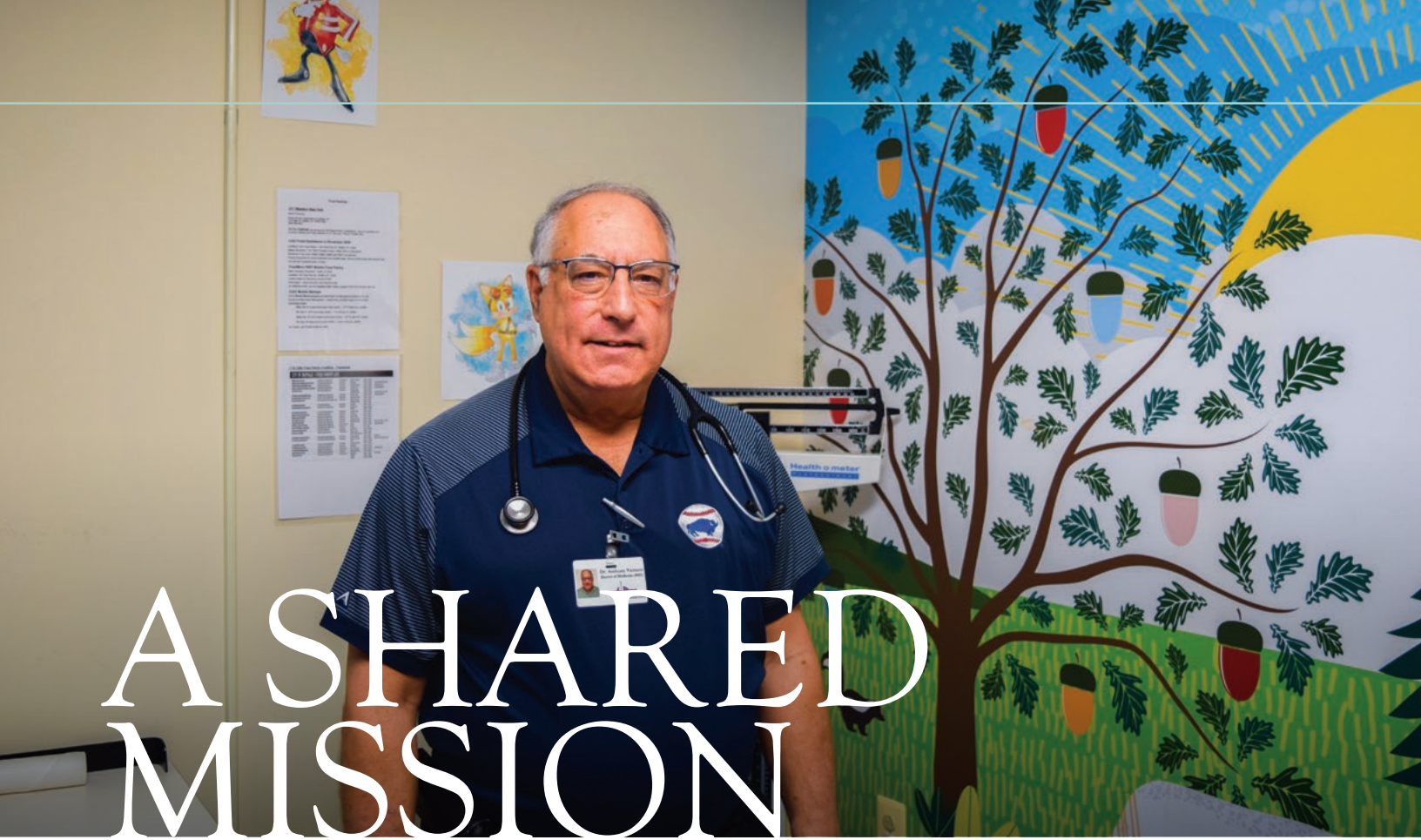
Inspired by the beloved “Who Was...” series of books, this new edition brings Father Baker’s story to life in a way that’s both fun and inspiring. To capture his spirit, OLV Charities teamed up with local illustrator Michael Gelen of Inkwell Studios, whose lively artwork brings energy and heart to every page. Printing was generously sponsored by the Catholic Parenting Initiative, making it possible to distribute free copies to Catholic school students across Western New York.

For Tom Lucia, chief creative officer at OLV Charities and the author of the book, creating a story for young readers was both a challenge and an honor. “It’s one thing to tell Father Baker’s life story to adults, but writing for kids meant every page had to be exciting and easy to connect with,” he explains. “We wanted our readers to not just learn about him, but to be inspired by him ... and maybe even see a little of themselves in his story.”

Students across the region are already exploring Father Baker’s life, learning how his compassion, determination, and faith changed countless lives. Families and fans of all ages can pick up copies at the OLV Basilica Gift Shop, located in the lower level of the Shrine.

With “Father Baker: A Friend to All,” a new generation now has a chance to meet a man whose heart was as big as his vision—and maybe discover a friend in Father Baker, too!





A SHARED MISSION

{ Century-Airport Pediatrics Joins OLV Human Services }

For more than three decades, Dr. Anthony “Tony” Vetrano has cared for children and families across WNY with a philosophy rooted in prevention, partnership, and whole-child wellness. Now, in a milestone moment for both his practice and OLV Human Services, Century-Airport Pediatrics has found a new home, and a renewed mission, on OLV’s campus.

“I’ve been a pediatrician for 35 years,” said Dr. Vetrano. “From the beginning, I believed that children get better when they’re sick. While counterintuitive, our job is to support that process and, even more importantly, to prevent problems before they begin.”

A Buffalo native and graduate of Canisius College, Dr. Vetrano earned his medical degree from Georgetown University School of Medicine before returning home to complete his residency at Children’s Hospital of Buffalo. He later served as Chairman of Pediatrics at Mercy Hospital while building a respected private practice grounded in thoughtful, comprehensive care.

His philosophy was shaped early in his medical training.

“At Georgetown, they didn’t just teach algorithms and medications,” he explained. “From day one, we were with patients. We were taught to think for ourselves and to look at the whole person and not just the diagnosis.”

That holistic view became the hallmark of Century-Airport Pediatrics. Well visits included written guidance on development, sleep, nutrition, school performance, behavior, and mental health.

As healthcare has evolved and Dr. Vetrano began considering the future of his practice, a natural partnership emerged with OLV Human Services. The connection came through Dr. Ted Andrews, a pediatrician and psychologist who previously worked in Dr. Vetrano’s practice and now serves as OLV’s Chief Medical Officer.

“From the first time I met the team at OLV, it was clear they were on a mission,” Dr. Vetrano said. “Their outlook wasn’t, ‘Let’s push away the difficult problems.’ It was, ‘Let’s embrace them and treat the whole family.’ That’s always been our philosophy, too.”

OLV Human Services has steadily grown into a comprehensive “medical home” model, bringing pediatric care, psychological services, counseling, developmental evaluations, and social supports together under one roof. Rather than sending families to multiple locations, care can be coordinated seamlessly across the agency.

“Put the pediatrician, the psychologist, the counselor, and the social worker together,” Dr. Vetrano said. “That’s a powerful tool to lead to better care.”

The partnership is especially meaningful in the areas of developmental and behavioral health. Century-Airport Pediatrics has long emphasized early diagnosis and prevention of conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, and behavioral challenges—priorities that are also central to OLV’s Evaluation and Treatment Center.

“The preventive work we’ve been doing fine-tunes and strengthens what OLV is already accomplishing,” Dr. Vetrano explained. “We’re aligned in wanting to identify concerns early and intervene thoughtfully.”

Dr. Andrews believes the integration reflects a model designed around the real needs families face today.

“One of the biggest advantages of this partnership is that families can receive comprehensive care in one place,” he said. “When those services are integrated with primary pediatric care, families are more likely to access the support they need. It reduces stigma, improves coordination, and allows us to work together to care for the whole child.”

For OLV supporters, this expansion of mission represents more than growth. It reflects a deepening commitment to children and families throughout the region. By integrating primary pediatric care with behavioral and developmental services, OLV strengthens its ability to walk alongside families from birth through young adulthood.

“Our goal has always been continuity of care,” Dr. Vetrano said. “We see children from birth through age 18. Now, with OLV, we can coordinate that care more completely than ever.”

By John Pitts



KEEPING FATHER BAKER'S PROMISE

Victory Learning Center Expansion



Almost every day, our phone rings with the same question: “*Do you have room for one more child?*”

Usually, the call comes from a school administrator searching for help for a student whose needs exceed what a traditional classroom can provide. Too

often, the answer is no. And every time we have to say it, I think about the family on the other end of that call.

These are children with autism, intellectual disabilities, and mental health challenges, whose needs are too complex for a typical classroom. Their public schools want to help, but many simply do not have the specialized staff, training, or space to meet their needs.

By law, districts must find these students an appropriate placement. The problem is that places like ours are increasingly difficult to find. Victory Learning Center at OLV Human Services is one of a handful of programs in New York State designed specifically for children facing both autism or a developmental disability and a mental health diagnosis.

Today, that is why more than 44 school districts rely on us to serve some of their most vulnerable students. And it is why, even after we opened five new classrooms last fall, more than 345 children remain on our

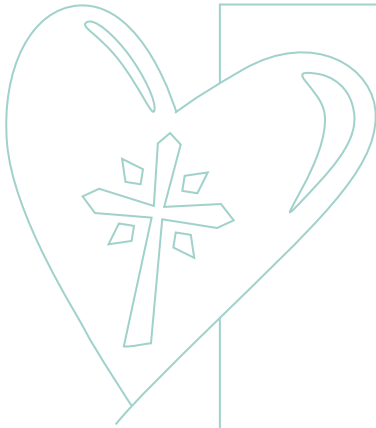
waiting list. Behind every number is a child with a story: a seven-year-old who has been sent home from school again and again. A teenager who spends her days isolated because no one understands her needs. Parents lying awake at night wondering if anyone, anywhere, will give their child a chance.

When a child enters Victory Learning Center, that story can begin to change. They join a classroom where teachers and therapists work side-by-side. They have access to quiet and sensory-friendly rooms to calm down, and appropriate spaces to move and play. Most importantly, they are surrounded by adults who understand that behavior is communication, not defiance. Over time, children who once struggled to engage, begin to connect. They make friends. They learn. They gain confidence. Our data shows it clearly: outbursts and aggression steadily decline, replaced by emotional regulation and real academic progress. Parents often tell us they finally recognize their child again.

Because the need is so great, the program is expanding. Over the next three years, Victory Learning Center will nearly double its capacity, growing from 102 students to 198. Existing campus buildings will be transformed into new classrooms, therapy spaces, sensory rooms, and recreational areas for kids to learn and thrive.



More than a century ago, Father Baker built this organization on a simple belief: every child deserves the opportunity for a healthier, brighter future. No exceptions.



Expanding Victory Learning Center is a commitment to children and their families who have nowhere else to turn. It is our opportunity to continue Father Baker's legacy and ensure that when the next phone call comes asking, "Do you have room for one more child?" we can answer yes.

That promise is ours to keep and expansion of our Victory Learning Center program is yet another way we are continuing Father Baker's legacy of caring.

*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.



ADVENTURE AWAITS!



As the 2026 summer camp season gets underway, the hills of Allegany State Park once again come alive with excitement as Camp Turner prepares to welcome a new generation of campers to a tradition more than a century in the making.

For more than 100 years, Camp Turner has offered young people a place to unplug from the distractions of daily life and reconnect with what matters most: faith, friendship, nature, and personal growth. Here, campers trade screens for horseback rides through wooded trails, afternoons at the archery range, creative arts and crafts projects, campfire songs, and adventures that inspire confidence and independence.

In a world increasingly dominated by technology, Camp Turner provides something rare and invaluable: a chance for children to simply be kids. Surrounded by God's creation and supported by caring counselors, campers build meaningful friendships, learn new skills, and discover strengths they never knew they had.

"Camp Turner is where young people can hear God's voice more clearly, form lifelong friendships, and discover who they are meant to be," says Camp Director John Mann. "Every summer, we watch campers grow in confidence, faith, and character. It's an experience that stays with them long after they leave."

That commitment to excellence is reflected in Camp Turner's recent accreditation by the American Camp Association, ensuring the highest standards in safety, programming, and youth development.

This summer, the camp's mission remains as strong as ever: helping young people grow closer to God, embrace new adventures, and create memories that last a lifetime. At Camp Turner, every trail leads to discovery, every campfire sparks connection, and every day offers the promise of something extraordinary!



Visit campturner.org or scan the QR code for more information on the many ways Camp Turner inspires young people to discover God through nature.

SERVING WITH JOY



For Camilla and Mark, volunteering at the St. Gianna Pregnancy Outreach Center location in downtown Buffalo isn't just community service ... it's a ministry.

The St. Gianna Center (SGC) assists women, fathers, and young families in need during and after pregnancy. The program provides clothing, blankets, bibs, bottles, diapers, wipes, and other basic infant care necessities. It also purchases new car seats and Pack 'n Plays for families who need them. Serving communities across the region through multiple locations, the program provides critical support to those facing challenging circumstances. In 2025 alone, nearly 1,000 families turned to the SGC for help!

For Camilla and Mark, every visit is an opportunity to serve others with dignity and compassionate care. One encounter, in particular, left a lasting impression on Camilla.

"A dad came to the center looking for diapers," she recalled. "When I gave them to him, he broke into tears."

The moment caught her by surprise and deeply moved her.

"That encounter was life-changing for me, and that's why I volunteer," Camilla said. "People have helped me and Mark, and we want to pay back a little. Volunteering at the Center gives us much joy and satisfaction."

Experiences like that remind both Camilla and Mark why they continue to serve. Beyond providing essential items, they are offering hope, encouragement, and a caring presence to people facing difficult circumstances.



The members of the SGC team remain deeply grateful for the donations, baby items, and financial support they receive from individuals throughout the community. Those gifts make it possible to continue serving families when they need help most. For more information on making a donation or becoming a volunteer, check out stgiannaoutreach.org or scan this code.



By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf



Carrying Forward a MISSION OF MERCY

In 2011, Kathryn Shultz witnessed what she describes as a miracle involving her daughter. In response, she made a promise to God. “I told Him I would do whatever He asked me to do,” she said.

Years later, while teaching music at OLV Elementary School and directing the student choir, an unexpected idea began taking hold. At the end of Mass, as students and staff prayed for Father Baker’s canonization, one line stood out to her: “... to help the poor, the homeless, and the young.”

“I thought, wow, someone should really assemble a service club with the kids and get them involved in community service,” Kathryn recalled. The thought refused to go away. “It just wouldn’t leave my head. I’d wake up at three in the morning thinking, okay, I really should start this service club.”

Finally, in March 2015, she did.

What began as a simple idea quickly grew into something much larger. Nearly 50 students joined in the first year, a significant percentage of the school’s overall enrollment. Over time, parents began volunteering alongside their children. Families invited friends. Community members joined in.

“Eventually it evolved into family volunteering and became a

community-wide program,” Kathryn said.

What started as a small group has since become a ministry rooted in Father Baker’s legacy and guided by the Seven Corporal Works of Mercy. Volunteer projects have included collecting clothing for foster children, gathering necessities for parolees, assembling Easter baskets for St. Luke’s Mission, creating cards for nursing home residents, placing flowers at the infant site in the cemetery, and hosting an annual picnic for school-age children and residents served by OLV Human Services.

Bridget Wood, current president of the Service Club, believes that focus on meaningful service is what makes the organization special.

“What’s great is what Kathryn started is based on the idea that the kids are the hands of Father Baker in this day and age,” she said. “Following the Corporal Works of Mercy really keeps us focused on solid service activities that truly benefit the people that need it most.”

While the service projects themselves are impactful, many volunteers say the relationships formed through the club are what keep them coming back. Membership now includes students, families, parishioners from OLV Parish, and

community members from a variety of faith backgrounds.

“Activities provide time for families to bond on weekends,” Kathryn said. “We also have people of different denominations and faiths that volunteer, so that’s really nice, bringing the community together.”

Some of the students who joined in the club’s earliest years have gone on to college and still return to volunteer when they can. The organization has even been able to provide scholarships for high school and college students.

For Noah Wollschlager, who has been involved since the beginning, the experience helped him discover a larger world beyond the classroom.

“It’s definitely helped out a lot,” he said. “It’s pushed me outside of my own neighborhood and into all different parts of the community. It’s nice to have the opportunities to meet new people, learn new things and make new friends.”

For Audrey Schmauss, who has volunteered for three years, two service experiences stand out most in her memory. The first was helping place flowers at the graves of infants in nearby Holy Cross Cemetery. The second involved wrapping Christmas gifts for a six-year-old child in need. “I made 23 presents for her,” Audrey said with a smile. “I bet she was happy!”

Volunteer Kelly Hallinan has watched the club’s impact span generations. Her granddaughters have been involved for nearly a decade. “They really wanted to provide and give to others,” she said. “I think it gets instilled in them at a young age.”

She points to the annual picnic with OLV Human Services residents as one of the most transformative experiences. “The kids are helping decorate cookies, serving food, doing face painting, and helping clean up,” Kelly said. “It’s all integrated. Working with people with disabilities has been eye-opening for them.”

Today, the OLV Service Club continues to grow. Recent initiatives include a Lenten Soup & Speakers Series and meal-preparation projects for local homeless shelters.

“We peel potatoes, carrots, and chop cabbage so the shelter staff can focus on cooking,” Bridget explained. “It makes it easier for them, and it gives the people in the shelter some

fresh food to eat.”

More than a decade after Kathryn made a promise to God, the idea that once kept her awake at three in the morning continues to touch lives throughout WNY. What began as a simple thought during prayer has become a living expression of Father Baker’s legacy ... one act of service at a time.

By Kelli Eagan



GREETINGS FROM *Florida*

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





SHARING THEIR GIFTS

{ Colleen and Tim Tevens Help Carry Father Baker's Mission Forward }

For Colleen and Tim Tevens, supporting OLV is both a privilege and a joy.

When asked to help with fundraising and serve on its capital campaign committee, the couple was honored to lend their time, expertise, and resources to an organization they deeply admire.

"We are grateful for all we have and therefore want to share our gifts," they said.

That spirit of generosity has guided them throughout their lives. Whether helping build St. Mary's Church in Swormville, N.Y., or supporting the restoration of Father Baker's Basilica, Colleen and Tim find fulfillment in giving back.

"Helping those most in need, along with preserving the Basilica as a wonderful place of worship for another 100 years, gives us much joy," they said.

Married for 49 years, the couple has built a life centered on faith and family. They are proud parents of three sons and grandparents to six grandchildren.

Tim's connection to Father Baker's mission is also deeply personal. Through conversations with his father, he learned that his grandfather was once a "Baker Boy," a person who grew up on the OLV campus during the humble priest's lifetime. In fact, Father Baker himself helped Tim's grandfather attend Canisius High School, creating a family bond to OLV that continues today.

That connection inspires the couple to introduce others to Father Baker's legacy. Through receptions and dinners, particularly in Florida, they enjoy sharing the story of OLV and its mission.

"Thinking of the vast number of Father Baker's extended Buffalo family, especially in Florida, it's a very easy task to ask them to help an organization as great as OLV," Tim said.

For Colleen and Tim, every gift—large or small—helps continue Father Baker's work. Their generosity reflects a simple belief: when people share their blessings, lives are changed and legacies endure.

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf

REMEMBERING *Faithful Friends*

The OLV family recently said goodbye to three cherished supporters whose lives embodied Father Baker's spirit of faith, service, and generosity. While each left a unique mark on OLV and the community, all shared a commitment to helping others and strengthening the mission they loved.

On December 14, 2025, we mourned the loss of Dr. John H. Twist, a loyal parishioner, daily communicant, longtime trustee, volunteer, and generous benefactor.

"OLV was Dr. Twist's spiritual home and truly part of his DNA," said Msgr. David LiPuma, pastor/rector of OLV National Shrine & Basilica.

For decades, Dr. Twist quietly served both his parish and profession. In addition to caring for generations of Lackawanna residents as a dentist, he volunteered tirelessly at OLV as a member of the Parish Financial Council, St. Vincent de Paul Society, gardening committee, and numerous fundraising initiatives.

Dedicated to education and mentorship, Dr. Twist's legacy continues through the John H. Twist, DDS, Scholarship at the University at Buffalo School of Dental Medicine. He will be remembered for his gentle spirit, wise counsel, and unwavering compassion.

As we grieved the loss of one devoted friend, we were soon called to honor two more.



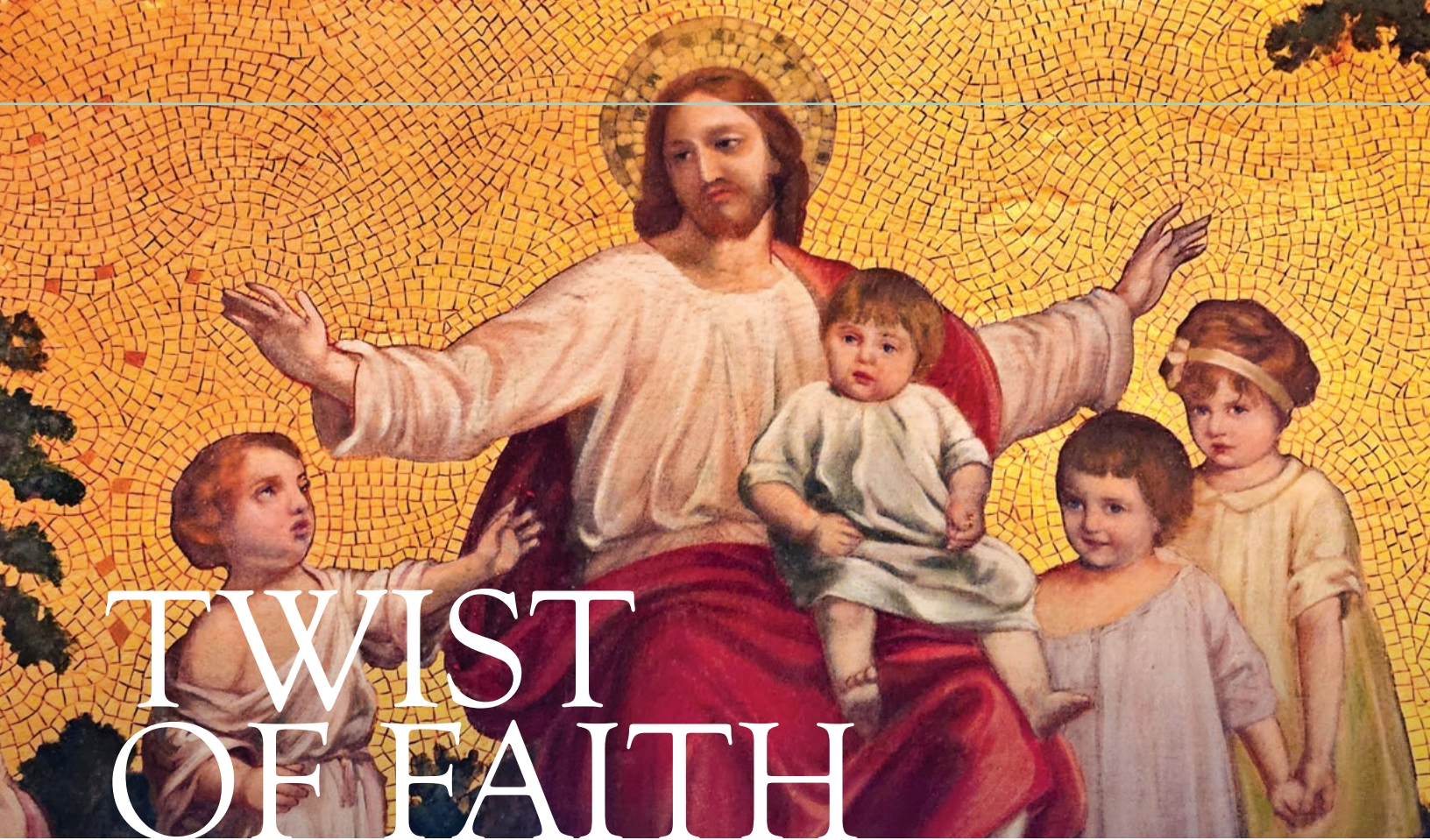
Just weeks later, the OLV family joined the region in mourning the passing of James Glynn on December 28, 2025, followed by his wife, Mary, on January 14, 2026.

Known throughout the region for their deep faith, strong family values, and extraordinary generosity, Jim and Mary devoted their lives to serving others. Through Jim's leadership of the Maid of the Mist and Mary's steadfast partnership, they established a remarkable legacy of philanthropy and community involvement.

As longtime supporters of OLV, they championed Father Baker's mission for more than two decades. They sponsored countless events, hosted OLV's first donor reception in Florida, and helped expand awareness of the ministry beyond WNY. Through Jim's leadership, Maid of the Mist became a leading sponsor of OLV's televised Mass, bringing worship from the Basilica into the homes of tens of thousands of viewers each week.

We give thanks for the lives of Dr. John Twist, James Glynn, and Mary Glynn. Their leadership, generosity, and commitment to serving others strengthened OLV and touched countless lives. Though they will be deeply missed, their legacy lives on through the mission they faithfully supported.

Requiescat in Pace.



TWIST OF FAITH

More than a century ago, a series of events brought two stories together. One belonged to a hard-working immigrant family and the other to a young priest whose ministry would transform a community.

The fascinating story of the Twist family and Father Nelson Baker is woven into the history of Lackawanna and OLV National Shrine & Basilica. Spanning generations, it is a story of faith, friendship, perseverance, and a shared commitment to community that, remarkably, continues to resonate today.

The Twist family—Margaret Hafey, Patrick Gaul and their three children—came from Newfoundland, Canada, to Lackawanna, N.Y., where Patrick found work at the Bethlehem Steel Plant. While living here, Margaret and Patrick welcomed two more children. Tragedy struck when Patrick was killed in an accident at the age of 35, leaving Margaret widowed with five young children.

In time, family friend Edward Oliver Twist married Margaret,

and together they had two additional children. They lived above the Twist Brothers store on South Park Avenue, across from the Erie County Botanical Gardens, before eventually purchasing a home on Rosary Avenue. Other branches of the growing Twist family settled nearby in the McKinley and Rosary Avenue neighborhoods, creating deep roots in the community.



Over the years, Father Baker's friendship with the members of the Twist family flourished. It is likely that he brought his horses to August Twist, a local blacksmith, to have their hooves shod and wagon wheels repaired, and conducted his banking with Frank Twist, a respected local banker.

One of the earliest recorded connections between the family and the humble priest occurred in 1880, when Henry J. Twist, son of August, married Rosa Fix at St. Patrick's Church, the shrine that stood on the OLV campus before the Basilica was built. A young Father Baker, then in his late 30s, celebrated the Mass and witnessed their marriage vows. Records indicate it was the

first wedding ever performed at St. Patrick's. Fifty years later, in 1930, Father Baker celebrated a Mass honoring their golden wedding anniversary that was held within the Basilica.

As Father Baker oversaw the construction of the Shrine in the mid-1920s, he commissioned renowned artist Gonippo Raggi to decorate its interior. While painting the Basilica's murals, Raggi, his wife, and children lived in a second-floor apartment in the home of August and Alice Twist on South Park and McKinley Avenues, just a block from the Basilica. The arrangement was made as a favor to Father Baker.

In gratitude, Raggi painted the faces of the Twist family's three grandchildren—Alice, Jean, and Dorothy—into the beloved mural Christ and the Children in the Basilica's entrance foyer, where they remain to this day.

Father Baker was also a welcomed guest in many Twist homes. Family members fondly recalled that when crystal glasses and special dishes appeared on the dining room table, it usually meant Father Baker would be joining them.

Heartwarming correspondence between Father Baker and members of the Twist family is preserved in the OLV Archives. One letter, written following the death of Frank Twist Sr., expresses Father Baker's regret that illness prevented him from attending the funeral, a small, but meaningful, reflection of the genuine friendships he shared with the family.

As devoted Catholics, the Twists played an active role in parish life. Family members assisted Father Baker at St. Patrick's Church, helped establish Our Lady of Victory Parish, and supported the

organization of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Parish in nearby Orchard Park, which began as an OLV mission parish in 1921.

Their service touched nearly every aspect of parish life. Twist family members served as parish council president, organist and music director, and president of the Altar and Rosary Society. At OLV, Twists helped with fundraising, cared for altar linens, supported the Infant Home, served as altar boys, and assisted with the care of children awaiting adoption.

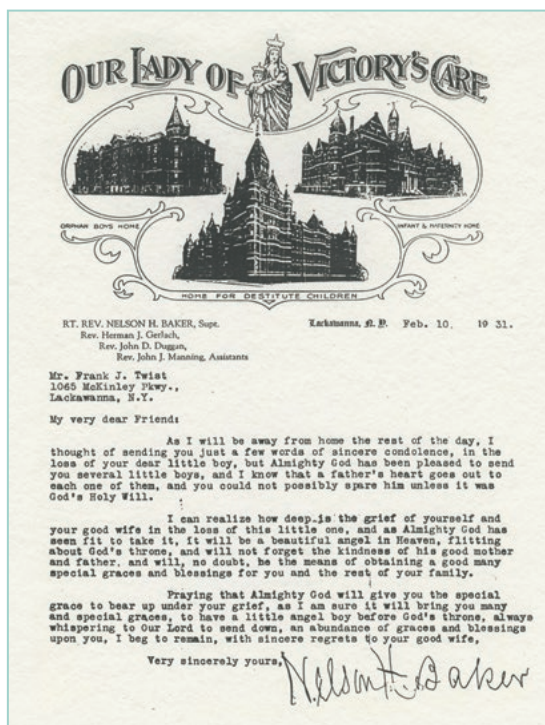
The grandmother of Sister Mary Ellen Twist, RSM, a 2025 retiree of OLV Charities herself, opened her home to boys who had aged out of the orphanage. Among them was Jerry Schenk, the last surviving "Baker Boy."

The final member of that generation, John Twist, passed away on December 14, 2025. Like those who came before him, he remained a faithful servant and dedicated trustee of OLV Parish.

When asked why the Twist family maintained such a deep connection to Father Baker and OLV for so many generations, family members point to Father Baker's kindness, his genuine friendships, and the many visits he made to their homes over the years. Today, they believe that connection will continue through the stories, memories, and treasured keepsakes passed from one generation to the next. As one family member reflected, "OLV is considered home."

This piece is based on the reflections of Sister Mary Ellen Twist, RSM (pictured left), and other members of the Twist family.

By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf



VICTORY NITE RETURNS *September 16*

Get ready for one of the region's most anticipated evenings of celebration and philanthropy! OLV Charities' signature fundraising gala, **Victory Nite**, returns on **Wednesday, September 16, 2026, at the beautiful Atrium at Rich's.**

This unforgettable event brings together community leaders, supporters, and friends of OLV for an evening featuring signature cocktails, exceptional cuisine, exciting silent and live auctions, and inspiring stories of service. The highlight of the evening will be the presentation of the prestigious **Father Baker Service Awards**, honoring individuals whose dedication has made a lasting impact on our community.

This year's honorees include **Richard C. and Karen E. Penfold**, **Max Donatelli**, and student leader **Matthew Armento**.



More than a gala, Victory Nite is a celebration of Father Baker's enduring spirit of compassion, generosity, and service. Mark your calendar and join us for a night of excitement, inspiration, and support for the life-changing work of OLV Charities.

Scan the code with your phone, visit OLVCharities.org/victorynite, or call (716) 828-9610 to get your tickets today!

Walk in the Footsteps of the EARLY CHURCH



Join Father David for a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Greece from **September 22 through October 2**. This special journey of faith will bring the New Testament to life as pilgrims explore the lands where St. Paul preached and the early Christian Church took root.

Arranged through Catholic Journeys, the pilgrimage includes daily private Mass, first-class accommodations, breakfast and dinner daily, round-trip airfare from Toronto, and a three-day Mediterranean island cruise.

Space is limited. Don't miss this opportunity to deepen your faith while experiencing the history, beauty, and spirituality of Greece. Contact Kim at (716) 828-9607 for more information.

Upcoming EVENTS

August
1&2

Father Baker Weekend

Join us for Father Baker Weekend and Pennies to Heaven 2026. Slated for August 1-2, the weekend features our popular Jazz Mass, live entertainment, a car show, Kids' Zone, raffles, food and drinks, a Chicken BBQ, art exhibit, and the cherished Penny Drop outside the Basilica. For details, check out penniestoheaven.org.

September
16

Victory Nite

Victory Nite returns to the Atrium at Rich's for OLV's signature fundraising gala. Guests will enjoy cocktails, exceptional cuisine, silent and live auctions, and the presentation of the prestigious Father Baker Service Awards. This year's honorees include Richard and Karen Penfold, Max Donatelli, and student Matthew Armento. Join us for an unforgettable evening of celebration and impact. Get your tickets today by going to olvcharities.org/victorynite.

October
7

Feast of Our Lady of Victory

Celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Victory on October 7, a special day on OLV's campus honoring Father Baker's deep devotion to his patroness, the Blessed Mother. The festivities culminate in Mass in her honor. More information will be announced soon.

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