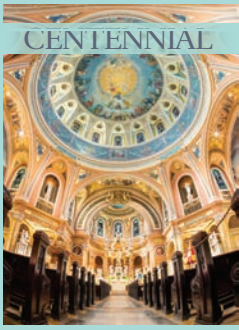


CENTENNIAL

celebrating 100 years of inspiration





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OLV Charities

A Father Baker Legacy

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About the Cover: More than 120 feet above the ground, the great dome of OLV National Shrine & Basilica depicts the Assumption and Coronation of the Blessed Mother. Photo courtesy of Gary Butler, rgbutler52@gmail.com

President's Message

On clear summer mornings, there is no more beautiful sight than the sun breaching the horizon and cascading light over OLV National Shrine & Basilica. You can see every striation in the 18-foot trumpeting angels and the cross at the peak of the dome.

It is amazing to think that 100 years ago, Father Nelson Baker – at the age of 79 – placed the Basilica's cornerstone and commenced a five-year journey that would result in one of the most splendid architectural wonders ever created.

Because of his vision, the Basilica has become a sanctuary wherein people can pray for intercession and miracles. Because of his vision, the Basilica has given tens of thousands of individuals the opportunity to share moments of pure joy like baptisms and weddings and difficult times such as funerals and crises.

We reflect on the past 100 years and all of the blessings Father Baker bestowed on us.

Father Baker used his life's work to show what it meant to be a Servant of God. He understood the power of creating a community that could care for hundreds of thousands of people. And he recognized how the simple act of sitting in the Basilica could bring comfort to the downtrodden and those who have lost hope.

Today, we – worshippers, pilgrims, benefactors, friends, and community partners – stand on the shoulders of greatness. It is because of Father Baker's devotion to our Blessed Mother, Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Victory, that we can look toward the next 100 years to ensure that future generations will be able to experience the splendor of the Basilica as we have.

I'm very excited to share this moment in history with you. As we embark on OLV's five-year Centennial Celebration, I pray that Father Baker will continue to intercede for you and Our Lady of Victory protect you. Be assured of my grateful prayers and best wishes.

Rev. Msgr. David G. LiPuma



*Pastor and Rector, OLV National Shrine & Basilica
President, OLV Institutions*



CEO's Message

Ever since my teen years, I have had a passion for sacred spaces ~ chapels, churches, shrines, basilicas, and cathedrals. I have been blessed to experience architectural wonders all across Europe, Asia, and Africa.

These glorious buildings are, most often, integral parts of their communities, serving first as places of religious devotion and pilgrimage, but also as important social centers and objects of great civic or national pride.

These engineering marvels often took many decades, some even taking hundreds of years, to complete. They stand as powerful symbols of faith and perseverance, and remain cherished structures steeped in national and cultural histories.

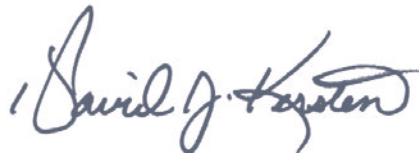
Unlike those sites that took decades to build, Father Baker, through a combination of administrative talent and drive, was able to complete his great Shrine of Our Lady of Victory in under five years. His work was a testament to his devotion to his patroness, Mary.

Like all historical buildings, OLV National Shrine & Basilica is vulnerable to harsh environmental conditions. OLV Charities, through the generosity of its benefactors across the country, is pleased to help lead and support the preservation and restoration of our beloved Basilica and advance Father Baker's legacy of caring.

Now, 100 years later, the Basilica remains a revered destination that welcomes individuals of all faiths. As an iconic fixture of the region, the Basilica, with its colonnades acting as outstretched, welcoming arms, is a beacon for those navigating their journey of spiritual seeking and understanding. The grand structure transcends civic and cultural constructs, as it has enormous potential to reinvigorate the fabric of our community by continuing the 160-year legacy of charitable service work provided under the "shadow of the great dome."

I welcome you to experience the grandeur - and transformative influence - of the Basilica and invite you to enjoy this inaugural issue of our new magazine, *Centennial*.

David J. Kersten



CEO, OLV Charities



RESTORE

PRESERVE

In its 100 years, countless thousands of people from around the world have passed through the doors of OLV National Shrine & Basilica. Each has left awestruck and inspired by its beauty. To ensure it exists for another century, though, much needs to be done.



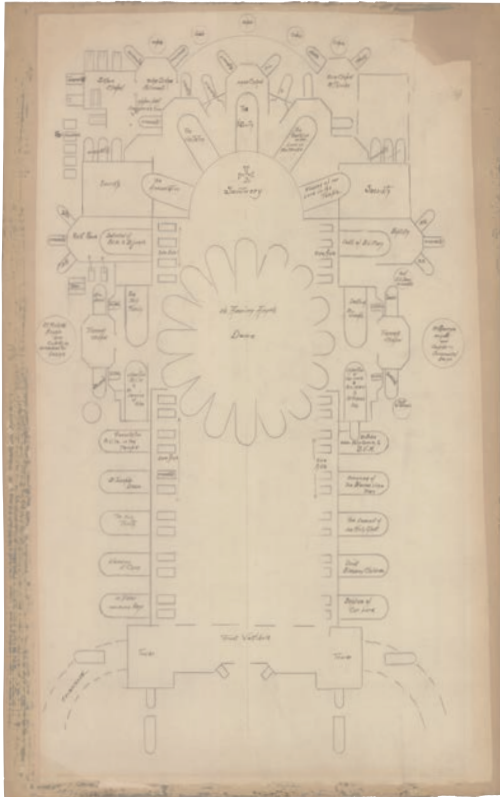
Construction on the Basilica began in 1921 and ended in time for Christmas Mass in 1925. It was consecrated in May of 1926.

Rising 165 feet into the South Buffalo sky, the OLV National Shrine & Basilica stands as one of Western New York's defining landmarks. Designed in the late French Renaissance style by architect Emile Uhlrich, the Shrine appears to have been plucked out of 15th-century Europe and placed amidst the remnants of what was once a bustling steel town on the shores of Lake Erie.

It is here, at the corner of Ridge Road and South Park Avenue in Lackawanna, N.Y., that, 100 years ago, Father Nelson Baker began construction on the crowning jewel of his "City of Charity," the ultimate expression of gratitude and devotion to his patroness, the Blessed Mother under her title of Our Lady of Victory.

Father Baker's vision was carried out by approximately 22 significant contractors, many of whom were Western New York firms. Portions of the work, including the heating and cooling system (John W. Danforth Co.) and the granite foundation (Stone Art Memorial Co.), were undertaken by local companies still in business today.

“Among the churches of America, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Victory, is for many reasons, to be counted as one of the greatest”



An early draft of the Basilica's floor plan. This unique document can be found in the Father Baker Museum located underneath the Shrine.

In fact, the work of these meticulous local residents has withstood the test of time. A comprehensive Facilities Assessment Report, conducted by Schneider Architectural Services in 2020, noted that Danforth's heating system is still in good working order, and the cooling and ventilation system, designed with an "Ice Block Closet," is "quite simple and ingenious for the time of design."

The exterior is constructed of pure white marble supplied by the Georgia Marble Company of Tate, Ga. A combination of more than 40 different types, colors, and designs of Italian marble can be found throughout the interior. Flanking the altar are four, swirled marble columns of rare red Spanish marble. Artists



Local tradesmen were involved in every aspect of construction.



A recent assessment by Schneider Architectural Services identified a number of areas within the Basilica in need of immediate attention. Pictured above are Jake Schneider (right) and Tom Kujawa (left).

Gonippo Raggi and Marion Rzeznik were given several commissions to decorate the dome, chapels, and the baptistery.

Upon its consecration in 1926, the Shrine was only the second minor basilica (the first was the Basilica of St. Mary in Minneapolis, Minn.) in the U.S. The Cardinal Secretary of State in the Vatican commented at the time, "Among the churches of America, the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Victory, is for many reasons, to be counted as one of the greatest." Echoing the praise from decades ago, Duncan G. Stroik, author and professor of architecture at the University of Notre Dame, describes the Shrine as Uhlrich's "magnum opus" and "one of the finest Catholic Shrines in America."

Western New York's harsh climate takes its toll on masonry, forcing constant attention due to the annual freeze/thaw cycle."

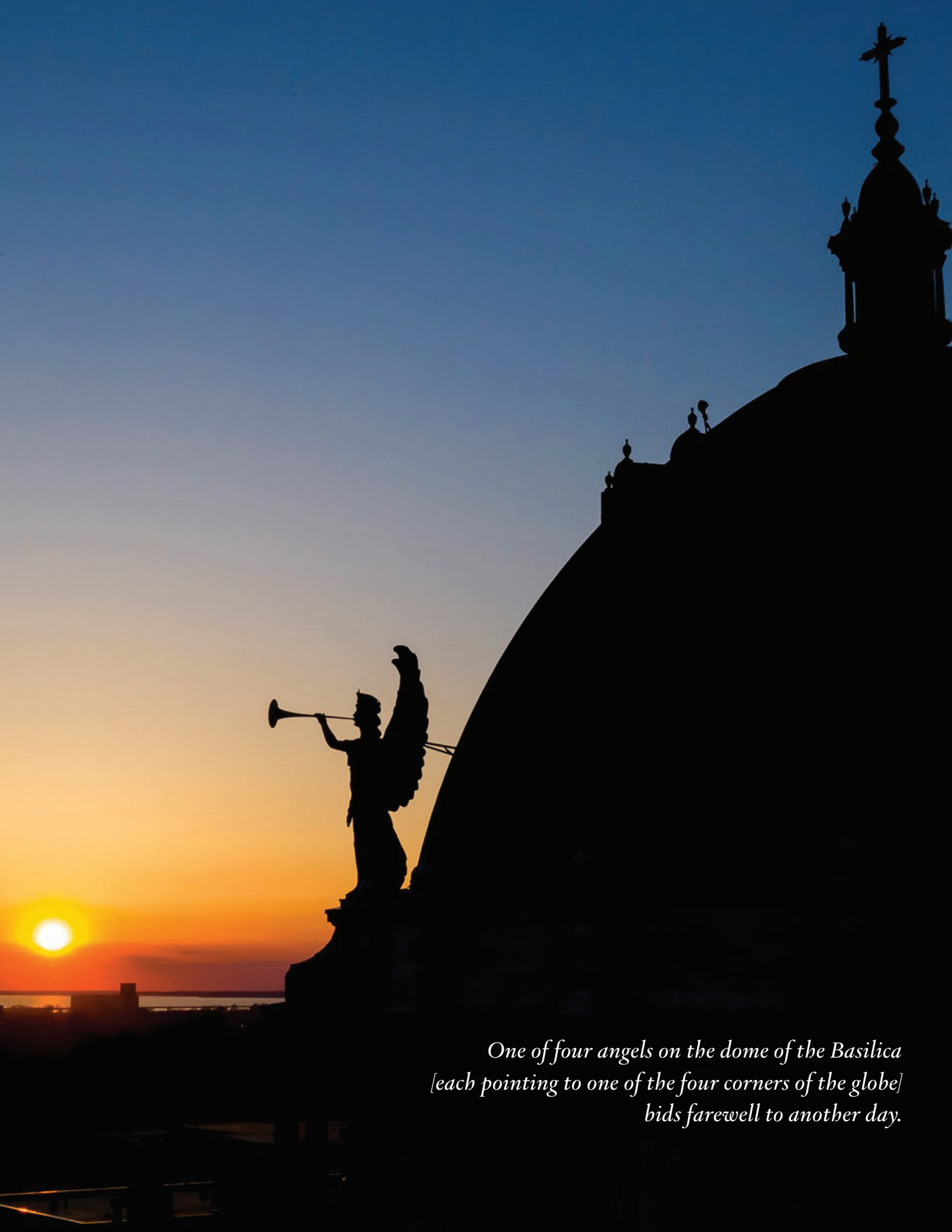
Today, the Shrine represents the life, legacy, and profound faith of a humble ~ but passionate ~ man, Father Nelson Baker. As the steward of his legacy, OLV Charities is tasked with sustaining the maintenance and preservation of this wonder for another 100 years and beyond.

However, just as thousands of other historic places of worship across the country have gone into decline, closed, or been demolished due to rising costs, diminished resources, and shrinking congregations, OLV, too, is faced with challenges regarding its upkeep.

During the summer of 2020, heavy rains caused structural damage and flooding within the Basilica proper, as well as in the Father Baker Museum and Gift Shop on the lower level. This was the result of a deteriorated roof system and damaged internal drain pipes that are contained within the walls of the Shrine.

Buffalo's harsh climate takes its toll on masonry, forcing constant attention due to the annual freeze/thaw cycle. The pews, constructed of now-extinct African Mahogany, have become worn and unprotected. Italian marble floors show signs of the passage of countless footfalls. Cracks in plasterwork streak across the walls. And murals, statues and other works of art have all seen time take its toll.





*One of four angels on the dome of the Basilica
[each pointing to one of the four corners of the globe]
bids farewell to another day.*



While the centennial anniversary of the Shrine has heightened awareness of significant and urgently needed capital improvements, it has also provided OLV the perfect opportunity to engage with the national cultural and historic preservation community.



One such avenue has been a collaboration with the Partners for Sacred Places and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “We were thrilled to be accepted into the 2020 cohort of the prestigious National Fund for Sacred Places grant program,” says Rev. Msgr. David G. LiPuma, Pastor and Rector of the Shrine. “OLV is one of 16 congregations across the United States to receive an award this round, giving us the opportunity to receive a \$250,000 matching capital grant that will help us make critical improvements to the building and enhance community spaces on the lower level.”

“Organizations like OLV have a true commitment to service, offering tremendous civic value to their community. Congregations such as these are well poised to grow and thrive in the future,” said Bob Jaeger, President of Partners for Sacred Places. “We look forward to working with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the team at OLV to restore the building and help preserve an important piece of history.”

Readers might also be surprised to discover that the Basilica is not currently listed on the New York State and/or National Registers of Historic Places, a designation that could bring with it additional funding opportunities. “The centennial anniversary has afforded us the chance to reflect upon, respond to, and renew our commitment to Father Baker’s great legacy,” said David Kersten, CEO of OLV Charities. “We’re exploring all options to ensure the long-term viability and preservation of our beautiful Basilica, including listings on the historic registers.”

Ultimately, the centennial celebrations over the next five years, which will include community events such as a speaker series, concerts and special events, will present OLV and thousands of worshipers, pilgrims, parishioners, and interested community members the opportunity to build on Father Baker’s greatest achievement and consider anew the Basilica’s importance.

*By Thomas C. Lajewski
Director of Corporate and Foundation Giving*



Trauma

For many of the young people receiving care at OLV Human Services, a woundedness spurs their negative behaviors: Trauma



Fear. Anger. Helplessness. Shame. For years, such feelings were part of Audrey's life. At a young age, she and her sisters were sexually abused by their father. For her own survival, Audrey blocked out such memories, hiding her emotional pain.

Although she kept the secret about her father's abuse to herself, it became known that the house Audrey was living in was littered with garbage and animal feces. Shortly after, it was condemned and she was removed from her family's care and placed in a foster home.

Unwilling to deal with the trauma she had suffered, Audrey used running as a coping mechanism. She frequently ran away. When several placements didn't work out, she was brought to our emergency foster care program and eventually moved to one of our residences for young women.

Withdrawn at first, Audrey soon began to learn coping skills. When, finally, she was comfortable enough with her surroundings to reveal her father's abuse, she took her first steps toward a better future. These horrifying

experiences were at the root of so many of her negative behaviors! Since then, she has reconnected with her birth mother and has returned to her home.

"Trauma is an injury from which individuals need healing," says Dawn Gayadeen, of OLV Human Services (OLVHS) Outpatient Clinical Program. OLVHS is the evolution of Father Nelson Baker's life-saving programs for young people and has grown to become one of the largest agencies dealing with mental health issues in Western New York

If Father Baker had heard of Audrey's story, he probably would not have described what she went through as "trauma-induced," but he would have extended a healing hand to her as he did to thousands of needy infants, children, and teens in the early 20th century.

Known as the "Father of the Fatherless," his institutions became a destination for young people from just about everywhere! In 1925 alone, it was reported that residents came from 37 states and three Canadian provinces.

“Trauma-informed care acknowledges the need to understand a person’s life experiences in order to provide effective care”

—Halli Lavner, OLVHS
Director of Informed Trauma Care



Back then, Father Baker didn’t have the knowledge of trauma we have today, but he related to his wards by accepting and respecting them and providing for their needs. He showed understanding and compassion... and healed them!

The sad truth is that trauma has reverberated across communities for centuries. Causes include sexual, physical and emotional abuse, abandonment and domestic violence. All too often, distressed individuals avoid addressing trauma, and never come to grips with the real issue(s) plaguing them.

Today, research has increased our awareness of trauma’s impact on the brain and how it can be treated. OLVHS’s staff members have learned that identifying trauma is at the heart of positive outcomes.

“Trauma-informed care acknowledges the need to understand a

person’s life experiences in order to provide effective care,” says Halli Lavner, OLVHS’s Director of Informed Trauma Care. “It helps us put things in perspective and better understand each other’s behaviors. It shows us how we can best support everyone around us.”

For team members to get better at doing so, OLVHS is embarking on establishing a new evidence-based trauma model called Risking Connections, working with the Traumatic Stress Institute. The goal is to have staff in all programs trained by the end of the year.

While the legacy of Father Nelson Baker continues...healing and hope abound!

*By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance &
Christian Charity*



National Ambassador” Profile

Florida resident Tom Sheehan may live far from OLV, but OLV is never far from his heart!



Having touched the lives of countless thousands of individuals since its founding, Father Baker’s “City of Charity” has been graced with friends all over the United States! Here is the story of one such “National Ambassador,” Tom Sheehan...

Mary touches hearts. Such is the belief of a native of Western New York, Tom Sheehan, who is the Dealer Principal of Sheehan Buick GMC in Pompano Beach, Fla.

As a boy, Tom would occasionally accompany his father to Mass at the Basilica. Those visits were the beginning of a growing devotion to Mary and, to this day, she is the focus of Tom’s prayers. She guides and inspires him.

Whenever he returns to the area, Tom is sure to make a trip to the Basilica, wherein he feels Mary’s warmth leading him to God. It’s something pilgrims and visitors to the shrine are sure to experience. And so he encourages all to visit this sacred space!

“When I step out of the car and see the Basilica and walk in the doors, a glow comes over me. I know that Mary is always there and she never leaves.” Celebrating the Basilica’s centennial speaks to Tom about

God’s strength given to the world. Such a historic milestone also shows the strength of Father Baker’s legacy and ministry.

“In addition to promoting devotion to Mary, it’s all about the children. OLV’s purpose is to be a loving support to children in need,” says Tom. “I wish people had a greater awareness of the work of the institutions. Then, just as Mary cared for the child Jesus, I am sure they would participate in God’s work of helping children and families.”



So, even though he lives hundreds of miles from his home-away-from-home, OLV National Shrine & Basilica, Tom continues to share his passion for the place with anyone who feels as strongly as he does. *Thanks to him and the many other friends and benefactors around the nation who continue to “wave the flag” for OLV!*

*By Sister Dorothy Mueller, osf
Sisters of St. Francis of Penance &
Christian Charity*



[FATHER BAKER'S] LONG ROAD

Prayers for the intercession of saints may be a regular part of your day. But how much do you know about the canonization process?



Rev. Msgr. Paul Burkard serves as Vice Postulator for Venerable Nelson Baker's Cause for Canonization, a role he has proudly served in since 2007. He is always happy to provide a tutorial on the long, complex road to sainthood as well as an update.

Q: When and how did Father Baker's Cause begin?

Msgr. Burkard: Officially, it began in 1987 when the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome accepted the proposal from the diocese of Buffalo. The lead-up to that was really the work of Msgr. Walter Kern, the archivist for the diocese at the time, who was collecting information on Father Baker and serializing the story in the Catholic newspaper. Bishop Edward Head made the recommendation to begin the Cause.

Q: Where is Father Baker in the process currently?

Msgr. Burkard: The Road to Canonization is a four-step process. When Rome accepts the case, they assign the candidate the title of Servant of God. That's where Father Baker started in

1987. That led to the creation of a document about Father Baker's life and ministry called the *Positio*. It provides testimony from him and other people who he was close with about the holiness of his life. That was accepted by Pope Benedict XVI in 2011. And, at that point, Father Baker earned the title Venerable. That's where his Cause is now.



Father Baker earned the title of Venerable in 2011, an achievement celebrated at a special Mass presided over by Msgr. Paul Burkard, Vice Postulator for the Cause.

Q: How long does the process take?

Msgr. Burkard: There is no definite answer to that question, because it depends on the surfacing, vetting and acceptance of one miracle to attain the title of Blessed and then another to be



Msgr. Burkard holds up Venerable Nelson Baker's Positio, a thorough collection of writings and first-hand recollections that summarize his life and virtues. The book can be found in the Father Baker Museum, below the Basilica.

canonized. There are Causes that took 199 years and others, like those of Pope John Paul II, that are “fast-tracked” and take less time than that.

Q. So when exactly will Father Baker be canonized?

Msgr. Burkard (Chuckling): Everything is on God's time, not ours. My best answer is that it will be worked out and completed on God's time.

Q. How will canonization change things for him? For OLV?

Msgr. Burkard: When he is beatified, we will have a ceremony here at the Basilica. The cardinal from Rome in charge of the congregation would come. When that happens, devotion to Father Baker becomes more universalized. A Feast Day for Blessed Nelson Baker is added to the Church calendar and promulgated to the whole

world. In both cases, when it comes to Blessed and Sainthood, we'd see a rise in the number of people coming to the Basilica and we'd see a big increase in devotion to him.

Q. What can people do to help?

Msgr. Burkard: The best way to help is to continue to pray for Father Baker's intercession. And definitely report any spiritual favor or physical cure to us. The more reports we receive, the better chance we have of identifying a potential miracle and beginning the process of preparing and proposing it for investigation. **Folks are always welcome to contact me directly at (716) 828-9640.**

*By Thomas R. Lucia
Chief Creative Officer*



Father Baker's tomb is located within one of the Basilica's most unique places, the Grotto Shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes.

CENTENNIAL *News & Notes*

The Basilica's Centennial Celebration will run between 2021 and 2026 and offer plenty of ways for all to get involved...

Join Us!

Aug. 14-15: Kick-off Weekend. The Cornerstone Mass will take place on Saturday at 4:30 p.m. and be followed by a blessing by Most Rev. Msgr. Michael Fisher, bishop of the Diocese of Buffalo ... Father Baker Day Mass at 10 a.m. and the "Pennies to Heaven" chicken BBQ are set for Sunday.

Oct. 7: Feast Day of Our Lady of Victory Mass.

Nov. 5: Friends of Father Baker Award Celebration.

Centennial Speakers Series. Featuring Sister Norma Pimentel (who was included on *Time Magazine's* 2020 "100 Most Influential People in the World" list.)

Nov. 14: Adoption Mass. This noon Mass honors those touched by adoption.

Nov. 28: BPO Concert: The Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra will perform Handel's *Messiah* at the Basilica.



Pray With Us!

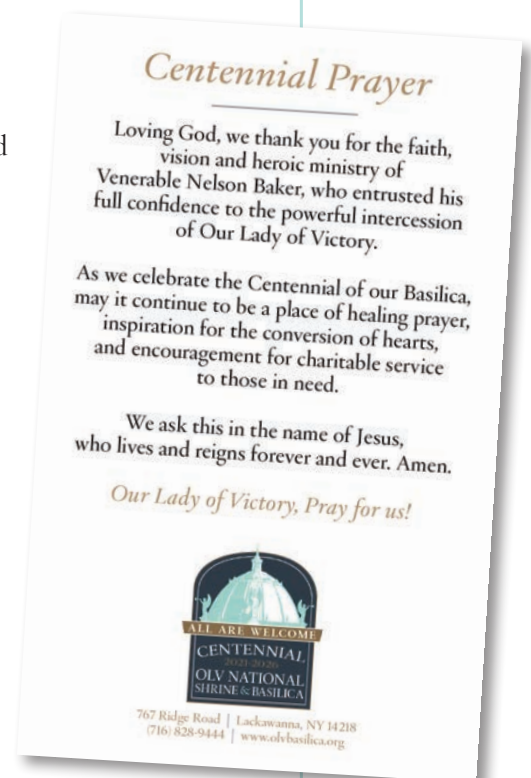
The Centennial Prayer (*right*) will become a regular part of Masses and events over the next five years. Call (716) 828-9648 to request your card.

Stay Tuned!

The Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) will feature Father Baker in an upcoming episode of "They Might Be Saints." A film crew will be on OLV's campus Aug 24-28 and the show is expected to air later in 2021. More information will follow.

Share Your OLV Story!

If you have an "OLV Story:" A connection to its history, a photograph or a piece of memorabilia, please share them with us. We will be posting these stories and images throughout the Celebration. Call (716) 828-9622 or email us at mystory@olvcharities.org.





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