A YEAR OF MERCY
The Gospel call us to love and service.
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The Year of Mercy

Living out the corporal works of mercy

FROM THE EDITOR

Last spring, Pope Francis announced that 2016 would be a Year of Mercy. This announcement was met with a media frenzy. What is a “Year of Mercy”? Why this year? Did a Year of Mercy mean everyone could act without fear of heavenly consequence?

As you will learn in the following pages, there are many elements to the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis explained that the “[Year of Mercy] will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy …”

The Year of Mercy is meant to call us into reconciliation with God and with one another. God’s forgiveness and mercy are given freely to all who ask, but it is not always as simple to repair our earthly relationships. To assist in brokering a peace between all humanity, we have been given a list of Works of Mercy which the Church identifies as either “corporal” (of the body) or “spiritual” in nature. There are seven of each type. Pope Francis asked Catholics to “rediscover” the Works of Mercy during this Jubilee Year. In this issue, we will focus on the corporal works of mercy. In the fall issue, we will illustrate the spiritual works.

Introduced by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, the corporal Works of Mercy ask us to minister to the physical and material needs of our fellow human beings. We are to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to visit the imprisoned, to visit the sick, and to bury the dead. In doing these tasks, we experience humanity at the most primal level. We become Christ to one another. We are reminded of how God meets our needs as we meet the needs of others. Our service to others humbles us, strengthens us, and connects us.

The Basilica of Saint Mary parish participates in Works of Mercy every day. In this issue, you will meet parishioners who are truly living in the spirit of mercy.

The priest at the parish where I grew up always closed Mass by saying, “The Mass is never ended; it must be lived. Go forth to love and serve the Lord.” The men and women profiled in this magazine live out this edict every day as do thousands of others who are not featured here. 2016 may be called the Year of Mercy, but the call to service extends much beyond a set time frame. Some ministries have been operating for years while others are just getting started. Acts of mercy come in many forms and different things are needed at different times. We must be vigilant to recognize and adapt to new needs, always asking ourselves how might I show mercy to someone? How might I go forth to love and serve the Lord?+

— Cecilia Hofmeister
God is Mercy
Living the foundation of the Church

In his speech opening the Second Vatican Council on October 11, 1962, Pope John XXIII (now St. John XXIII) said in part: “nowadays the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnations.” Fifty-three years later on December 8, 2015 in his speech opening the Holy Door at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, Pope Francis said: “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love.”

Despite the years that separate these two remarks, I think they share a common message — our Church must continually strive to proclaim the merciful and faithful love of our God for all people.

Now clearly our Church has not always done the above well. We must candidly admit that at times there have been some in our Church who have seemed to suggest that God is angry and displeased with us. They have presented a face of God that is stern and scolding. Certainly this can be off-putting for many people. Pope Francis has reminded us, though, that: “God has a real face. God has a name: God is mercy.”

How do we help people come to know the mercy of our God? Well, it seems to me, that we need to begin by acknowledging that all of us stand in need of God’s love and mercy, and that God offers those gifts to us — freely, unreservedly, and unconditionally. None of us earns God’s love and mercy; none of us merits it; none of us deserves it. We can only choose to accept it when it is offered to us. Once we have accepted the love and mercy that is offered to us, though, we are then called to share it with our brothers and sisters. By lives of faith, by the witness of our words and actions, we are called to be and to bring the mercy and love of God to our brothers and sisters. It is in this way that we help them to know that the name of God is mercy.

Now, as noted above, we don’t always do this well. At times we fail at it miserably. Yet we who believe in and rely on God’s love and mercy can never shrink from the task of sharing this love and mercy with those whom we encounter — despite our failings and failures. As followers of Jesus, our goal and our challenge is to live in such a way that by the witness of our lives people might look on us and say: “If these be his followers, what must the Master be like?”
You’ve likely heard the story before. The story of a large dentil stone falling from the side of The Basilica and landing just in front of a bronze door along Hennepin Ave. The stone, weighing in at 300 pounds, crushed the front steps of the church. Thankfully, no one was injured.

Today, that crushed step has been rebuilt. And even more significantly, that same step is the one leading parishioners, visitors, those on a pilgrimage, and those not realizing its significance at all, to our Holy Door during this Year of Mercy.

This Holy Door — and doors throughout the world — is integral to the celebration of the Year of Mercy. In essence, passing through this door gives us an opportunity to commit ourselves to living according to the Gospel and acting as Jesus taught us to act (read more on the Holy Door in the subsequent pages of this magazine).

This door is just one of the many examples of how The Basilica of Saint Mary serves as a place of worship, of pilgrimage, of hospitality, and of hope for so many people throughout our city, state, and even world. It truly is a beacon of hope for all those who pass through our doors.

But just like our spiritual lives, the life of The Basilica is not without flaw and imperfection. Take its design, as one example. Emmanuel Masqueray, the architect of The Basilica, had no idea the toll more than 100 Minnesota winters would take on a building of this size and magnitude.

But also like our spiritual lives, it takes a team of individuals to make this building strong and secure for years to come.

This team is The Basilica Landmark, which works to restore, preserve, and advance the historic Basilica of Saint Mary for all generations. Its mission is clear but there is much work to be done.

For years, this building was in disrepair with water leaking through the roof, plaster falling from the ceiling, and stones falling from the side of the building.

Thanks to the support of many generous donors and dedicated volunteers of The Basilica Landmark, this building and its campus continues to see improvements to fulfill the growing needs of the parish and community.

This year in addition to day-to-day maintenance and repairs, The Basilica Landmark plans to replace portions of the rubber roof of The Basilica and continue tuck-pointing work along the exterior of the church—to prevent another dentil from ever falling again.

Underlying all these improvements is the goal to provide a safe and nourishing home to the many individuals, ministries, and services housed within this community every day.

As a beacon of hope for this community — and especially in this Year of Mercy — I am grateful to have the opportunity to support the restoration and preservation of this campus for all who call The Basilica “home” and for all those who have joined me in this effort.

If you haven’t already done so, visit us online at thebasilicalandmark.org to learn more about the work and projects we have planned and completed. While there, please consider a gift to The Basilica Landmark’s annual fund at thebasilicalandmark.org/donate.

— Ann Wilczynski is president of The Basilica Landmark
Corporal Works of Mercy

Making peace in the Year of Mercy

They also constitute some of the most difficult work to put into practice as we go about our daily lives. Praying for an end to hunger, homelessness, and loneliness is important and necessary, but without working to feed people and advocate for real change in public policy, our work is not complete.

As Catholics, we are fortunate to have the Works of Mercy to guide us, inform us, and provide balance for our peace-making.

The word corporal translates into “of or relating to the human body.” Just as the Eucharist is placed on a cloth named a corporal during its consecration, the corporal works of mercy involve ministering to the human body. These works mandate that people who are poor in any way must be physically nourished with acts of kindness — with clean water, with healthy food, with sound shelter, with authentic friendship — and concrete work toward social justice.

Fr. James Keenan, S.J., warns that living according to the works of mercy can be “a messy business.” We end up entering into the chaos that exists in the lives of other people. “It is through the practice of these spiritual and corporal works of mercy that we concretely practice our Christian faith. As Catholics, we cling to these as beacons for living the Christian lifestyle. Through them, we show our willingness to enter into the chaos of another. Perhaps more than anything else, that’s what uniquely defines us as Catholics: It’s our legacy.”

Dorothy Day has long been credited with embodying the corporal works of mercy. She and her good friend, Peter Maurin, co-founded the Catholic Worker movement which continues today and personifies the corporal works of mercy as people are fed, sheltered, and loved. Day believed the works of mercy involve living a way of sacrifice, of worship, and with a sense of reverence for God and, thus, for each other. We are capable of loving God insofar as we are capable of loving each other.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Matt 25:35-36). There is a scene in the musical Godspell: The Gospel according to Matthew where the actors portray the sheep and the goats from Matthew’s telling of the Last Judgment which enumerates the corporal Works of Mercy. The lascivious goats can’t seem to figure out the importance of Jesus’ words; the sheep are boastful as they are confident they understand and are assured entrance into the Kingdom. The goats, upon realizing their errors in judgment, insist if they had known it was Jesus, they would have taken him out — for a couple of lamb chops! It’s a funny scene — yet it’s quite serious, too. The scene reminds us that these acts of mercy can be performed in many ways and that everyone is deserving of these gifts.

Catholics acknowledge the Kingdom of God is at hand. It is here. It is sheer gift. The real questions are: do we accept this gift? More importantly, do we embody this gift? Do our actions, our works, our commitments to all things just reveal the Kingdom? Do we make it known for all to see in us? And do we recognize the Jesus inherent in our sisters and brothers? As Oscar Romero prophetically spoke, “You are Jesus in the here and now.” May our lives reveal this truth through our actions of peace-making and through our incarnation of the corporal works of mercy.

In the following pages, you’ll be introduced to ways Basilica parishioners are working to incorporate the corporal works of mercy into their lives. You’ll likely be inspired and challenged to help in this important work and to continue our mission of caring for the city in which we have been called to serve.

Kelli Kester has been the Coordinator of Learning and Confirmation for Children and Youth at The Basilica for 9 years. Kelli loves the Triduum, traveling, and trying to matter.
Shelter the Homeless

Meet two who really call The Basilica ‘home’

BY SHANE KITZMAN

Odds are you’ve seen him. You may recognize him from standing on the Dunwoody Boulevard median, just outside the shadow that The Basilica of Saint Mary casts in the morning. He dons beige coveralls, flashes an illuminating grin, and holds a cardboard sign that simply says, “Please, help me. Thanks.”

Michael Ochieng, 38, is a fellow parishioner. One who, after spending Sunday inside The Basilica’s warm walls and attending 4:30 P.M. Mass (his favorite of the day), leaves at night without a home to call his own.

Often, home is under the I-94 bridge.

Alongside close friend Charlotte Robinson, 56, the two of them depend on, and appreciate, The Basilica’s services for those in need — a tangible example of sheltering the homeless in The Year of Mercy.

“My devotion to Our Lady has been around since I was young when I attended daily Mass,” said Michael, who grew up on the East Coast before arriving in Minneapolis some four years ago. “I was told the Rosary was a chain to Heaven and that you can call upon Our Lady, and she’ll be there for you.”

Overcoming life’s hurdles — with help

At just 16 years old, Charlotte arrived in Minneapolis from the Leech Lake Indian Reservation in hopes of finding her mother. She did. But not before her mother’s boyfriend had murdered her, Charlotte said. Then, just last month, Charlotte buried her daughter, Amanda, another victim of violence.

Helping make the trip to the funeral up north possible was Basilica director of Christian Life Janice Andersen, who provided a gas card.

“I’ve known Janice Andersen for 22 years,” Charlotte said, as her birthday, March 17, also happens to be Janice’s sobriety day. “I was looking for cardboard to make a sign years ago and I found her purse in the trash can outside The Basilica. Her ID and credit cards were still in it, and I returned it to her.”
The Basilica intertwines in the lives of Charlotte and Michael in more ways than one.

Saturday mornings spent in Teresa of Calcutta Hall offer breakfast, coffee, and hygiene kits. Then there are the services of St. Vincent de Paul: the Shoe Ministry (200,000 pairs provided since 1988), the Listening Ministry, plus bus fare to help with transportation to jobs, interviews, and more.

“Here at The Basilica, you can feel the presence and the faith of the people worshipping,” said Michael, who is also thankful for the meals offered at the school multiple times each week. “The people here are very welcoming … and we like the intellectual speakers who come in on Sunday night.”

Finding solace in fellow souls

Four years ago, Michael found himself without a roof over his head at night. The father of four, whose children now reside in Ohio with his ex-wife, wound up on the front lawn of The Basilica with nothing but few items outside of a bus fare and a rosary.

“Then an old guy approached me asking about my housing situation,” Michael recalled. “He asked if I was next to stand in line and hold a sign and ask for money.”

That was the first time Michael learned about “signing” and the do’s and don’ts of the trade.

He also wasn’t prepared to get denied service at restaurants and coffee shops even though he had money to purchase a drink and food — simply because he was carrying his life’s belongings in his bag on his shoulder.

But the toughest part of homelessness for Michael? The solitude.

Until he met Charlotte and her family, he was on his own. Now whether he is spending the night at Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army during the winter months, or under I-394 in the summertime, he’s accompanying Charlotte.

It’s a friendship fortified by faith, and by supporting one another as they work odd jobs and rely on the generosity of others, holding a sign on Lyndale Avenue.

“Charlotte has worked cleaning houses and also at Caring and Sharing Hands. I’ve worked on people’s yards, cutting the grass and mowing the lawn,” Michael said. “I’ve also volunteered at Catholic Charities, as that means I don’t have to wait in line for a shower ticket. And I then get to wash my clothes as many times as I want.”

What’s the future hold in store?

Charlotte’s also a great-grandmother and has battled breast cancer for the last two years.

But that doesn’t keep her from career goals. She hopes to attend Minneapolis Community and Technical College to secure a job in addiction counseling because she’s “been down that road” and believes she can be a guiding light to others.

Both Charlotte and Michael are sober. Michael was sure to emphasize that not all people holding a sign are sprinting to the liquor store afterward.

“The stereotype is widespread and unfortunately, everyone’s painted by the same stroke,” he said.

Good days for Charlotte and Michael include time well spent at the Hennepin County Library in Uptown. That’s where Michael is nose deep in books and online resources, aiming to own a small business in the next year or two.

“I don’t want to be somewhere in my 50s or 60s sitting in my rocking chair saying ‘I wish I could, I wish I could,’” he said. “I feel like I have this sleeping giant inside of me. And someone needs to wake it, and let it rise up and fly.”
That sleeping giant has spent many nights just feet from where Basilica parishioners park on Sunday, tucked up in the wedge between the rocky ground and the floor of I-94.

Within this Year of Mercy, see where you can improve the lives of others just like Charlotte and Michael. And keep them in your prayers.

Because you’re in their prayers.

After meeting them, shaking hands and saying goodbye, the two called out, “Please pray for us. We will be praying for you, too.”

Shane Kitzman is a former award-winning journalist who now works in public relations. He lives in St. Louis Park and loves cheering on the Fightin’ Irish.

By the Numbers

Every three years, Wilder Research conducts a one-night statewide survey of homeless people in Minnesota to better understand the prevalence, causes, circumstances, and effects of homelessness. The most recent study was conducted on October 22, 2015.

The 2015 study finds 9,312 homeless people in Minnesota. These initial results found homelessness in Minnesota decreased for the first time since 2006.

The study counted:
• 3,296 homeless children with parents, down 7 percent from 2012
• 1,542 families, down 12 percent
However, children with their parents still represent 35% of the overall homeless population, and remain the most likely age group to be homeless.

Other findings include:
• Youth on their own – age 24 and younger — make up 16 percent of the homeless population.
• Homeless adults – age 22-54 — decreased 13 percent since 2012 to 4,108 people in 2015.

Yet,
• the number of homeless adults – age 55 or older — increased 8 percent since 2012 to 843 in 2015.
• The number of people in emergency shelters dropped 8 percent and the number of people in transitional shelters dropped 5 percent —

while
• the number of people in domestic violence shelters increased 15 percent.

For more information on this survey, visit mnhomeless.org. If you’d like to get involved with The Basilica to help the homeless community, contact Janice at 612.317.3477 or jandersen@mary.org.
A hot meal and human contact. Sometimes those small things can make all the difference.

A Basilica Meals on Wheels delivery driver may be the only person a client may see that day and that personal interaction enriches someone’s life.

“Today I am more blessed than ever,” said Maria Medina de Smith, The Basilica’s Meals on Wheels volunteer team leader. “I love The Basilica’s Meals on Wheels ministry. I’m passionate about it. It’s the little things that light you up like knowing your clients and drivers by name and them being happy to see you that day.”

Meals on Wheels ministry

The Basilica Meals on Wheels team has been delivering nutritious meals to homebound neighbors in the Loring/Nicollet area since the 1970s as part of its St. Vincent de Paul ministries and is done in conjunction with Community Emergency Services. Volunteer drivers have come from as far away as Rochester and Wisconsin. Maria herself comes from Prior Lake to coordinate deliveries and sometimes drive.

The ministry delivers along five routes on Tuesdays, with routes taking 40 minutes to an hour and a half. Deliveries include a hot meal of three items. A cold meal for supper is also delivered.

Creating a team that changes lives

In 2013, The Basilica’s Meals on Wheels ministry found itself without a team leader. Initially, Maria volunteered for the ministry and was offered a seat on the board of directors but didn’t want to be “put on a pedestal” as she describes it.

“I wanted to be there with my drivers. I wanted to get to know them and for them to know me and each other. And I wanted to know exactly what they encountered on their routes,” she said.

She became ministry team leader and helps fill open routes without a driver, smooth out driver assignments, and field any issues. Assignments had been ad hoc, but de Smith says, “Now we are a team. And without my team, I’m nobody!”
Maria frequently does deliveries herself so she can hear driver concerns. “Driver safety is my priority,” she said. Getting feedback from drivers is critical. “It’s how I find out what’s working and what’s not, and what I might do to make things better for both the driver and the client.”

Drivers have folders about each client to include any special needs or situations like hearing or mobility problems so that adjustments can be made.

**Drivers needed**

Maria is always recruiting new volunteers. With more drivers, more clients can be served and she can adjust to open routes when someone may have to drop out temporarily or permanently because they have taken a new job that doesn’t permit them to do deliveries, retire, make medical appointments, or have some other life event that prevents them from delivering meals.

Volunteers must pass a background check before they are trained as drivers. This is essential since many of the clients receiving deliveries are vulnerable people with certain disabilities.

New volunteers are paired with an experienced driver to learn the routes and routines and any unique situations of the clients on that route.

Training includes how to be sensitive to each client’s situation. She relates a situation where a client was angry and took their anger out on a driver.

“When people are angry, they are usually afraid of something. I teach and model a process of healing, talking about what’s wrong,” she explained.

Maria is working to develop even more community among her drivers; they don’t just collect the meals and drive their routes. She holds meetings of all drivers and even organizes potlucks so drivers can get to know each other.

“I am so grateful to see my people, my drivers,” she said.

**Passion comes from life experiences**

What brought her to The Basilica’s Meals on Wheels ministry?

“Anything that can happen to a person has happened to me,” de Smith said. Maria has experienced first-hand — poverty, loss of a job, foreclosure, bankruptcy, the death of a baby, addiction, a suicide attempt, and a litany of many more seemingly insurmountable tragedies.

“I know what it’s like to be scared, to be hungry,” she said.

She never told anyone at The Basilica about these trials when she volunteered.

“I don’t see myself as a Hispanic, a woman, an immigrant, none of those things,” de Smith explained. “I just have a passion for this work because I’ve been there.”

All these things have made her grow through choice and perseverance; her choice is to use her experiences to help people.

She reflects that, “Things happen, and we doubt. There are the struggles and losses; the guilt and shame are the last things to be removed. But God gave you those experiences and God brought you back. I became who I am today and now I am at peace with myself and with God and I don’t ask ‘why me?’ At The Basilica, I found a place where I can find spiritual peace.”

**Sample the Experience with a Ride-along**

For anyone considering becoming a Meals on Wheels volunteer, an introductory ride along is an excellent way to see and experience what the ministry is like on the ground. Prospective volunteers who do it say they love it and want to become a driver. Besides the nuts and bolts of driving and deliveries, volunteers can experience the emotional rewards that come from interacting with clients and providing someone with a hot meal and a bit of companionship.

**Rewards beyond measure**

Relating how her life experiences have brought her to a place of helping others, de Smith said, “I’m a fighter. I’m proof you can go through anything. Humans can tell me it’s impossible, but my God decides what’s possible. There is no place where you can look and God is not there. “I have been blessed and blessed and blessed,” she said. “If you want to see miracles, open your eyes and look around at others. You can change somebody’s life.”

Charlene Roemhildt holds a BA in English and an MBA in marketing. She has over 40 years of experience in writing, editing, and interviewing and has been a member of The Basilica for more than 10 years.

If you’d like to volunteer in this ministry or any other at The Basilica, contact our volunteer coordinator at 612.317.3417.
So They Will Not Thirst

A local family’s commitment to the Pare people of northern Tanzania

Ironically, the most viable solution to the desperately insufficient water supply issues in Bwambo, Tanzania, has more to do with managing abundance than scarcity.

“Even the most arid regions of Africa have rainy seasons,” explains former Basilica parishioner and staff member, Molly Delaney Druffner. “Capturing that rainwater in holding tanks is often a far simpler and less expensive method of ensuring a safe, stable water supply than digging wells.”

Molly and her husband, Mark, a family practice physician in Hudson, Wis., and their seven children have worked with the Pare people of Tanzania’s mountainous northern region since 2009. Through their affiliation with the Mission Doctors Association, the Druffner family makes two, month-long mission trips to the village of Bwambo every year, in July and December.

Mission Doctors Association is a Catholic organization dedicated to creating sustainable medical care systems in underserved countries.

What began as a medical mission for the Druffners quickly evolved into an urgent effort to secure clean water for the health center and the Pare people.

“When we first arrived, the hospital had virtually no electricity and an extremely limited water supply,” Molly recounts. “Think about that: Doctors and nurses here in the U.S. are washing their hands every few minutes when they see patients. How do you run a medical clinic without access to clean water?”

In Africa and other parts of the world today, more children die of diarrheal diseases related to waterborne bacteria and parasites than malaria, measles, and HIV combined. And yet, diarrheal diseases are both preventable and treatable. According to the World Health Organization, a significant proportion of these diseases could be prevented simply through safe drinking water and adequate sanitation and hygiene.

The severity of Bwambo’s water situation became excruciatingly clear to Molly one afternoon during their first mission trip. Mark had just performed lifesaving emergency surgery on a young woman who would have otherwise bled to death.

“After the surgery, there was blood everywhere in the operating room — and no water to clean with. The missionary nurses had to sop up the blood with mops,” Molly recalls. “I knew at that moment that nothing mattered more than securing a reliable water supply.”

The Druffners sought out the advice of a
European humanitarian aid worker who had expertise in supplying clean, safe water to refugee camps throughout East Africa. He recommended purchasing large, plastic water tanks designed to catch and safely store the over-abundance of seasonal rainwater. The catchment system would be a better fit for Bwambo than the more traditional option of digging wells, he advised.

“There are broken and abandoned wells all across East Africa,” reports Molly. “With the best of intentions, nongovernment organizations have come into the area and built wells and irrigation systems, but when the wells fall into disrepair or break down, there isn’t anyone available to maintain or fix them.”

In some cases, wells have run dry in Africa because the water table has dropped, she adds. The cost of digging new wells has grown exorbitantly given the greater depth of the water source.

Once they identified the solution, the Druffner family held fundraisers to purchase a water catchment tank for Bwambo’s mission hospital. Today, the family is raising funds to purchase a larger water catchment system to supply the entire mission, including the health center, staff housing, and parish.

“We don’t need super high-tech, expensive systems to solve the clean water problems in East Africa,” says Molly.

“The water catchment system is a very simple tank with a simple tap. Water is replenished during the two rainy seasons every year when torrential rains are collected and stored in the tank. The seemingly insurmountable problem of supplying clean water to the area has a simple, low-tech solution,” she adds.

Working together, the Pare people make the most of the limited clean water sources currently available. Every Sunday following church services, community members and elders gather to decide which farms and family businesses are in most need of the area’s shared water supply in the week ahead, reports Molly. Priorities are determined and a plan is agreed upon by the community.

Smaller, 2,000-gallon catchment tanks for homes and family farms can be purchased for $1,300. And yet, for most families living in the village of Bwambo and the surrounding area, purchasing a catchment tank for their home or farm remains impossibly out of reach. The average daily wage is the equivalent of one dollar in the U.S. So instead, women and children spend hours every day walking for miles to fetch water by the bucketful for drinking, cooking, cleaning, gardening, and feeding farm animals.

Back home in the Twin Cities, the Druffners encourage families, businesses, and community organizations to host Water 4 Life events to raise awareness and funds to support clean water initiatives such as catchment tanks for Bwambo’s mission, village and farms. The family has established a nonprofit organization, Partners 4 Hope Tanzania, to support and empower the people of Tanzania through direct sponsorship opportunities and micro-loans.

In 2010, Molly established Woman 2 Woman, a micro-loan program that provides seed money for home-based business start-ups. Growing ginger has been one of the most immediately successful micro-loan enterprises, she reports. Women use micro-loans of $100 to $500 to purchase ginger seeds, a goat or cow to produce fertilizer, feed for the animal, and other start-up supplies. Within a year’s time, the ginger crops produce enough income for women to pay for their children’s school tuition, purchase solar panels for their home, or even secure a water catchment tank — and begin repaying their loan. The program has already empowered more than 200 women and their families.

“Once women sell their first ginger crop, they’re off and running with their enterprise. They don’t need our help any more,” reports Molly. “It’s been a hugely successful endeavor.”

Teri Mach Ryan is a parishioner who works as a freelance writer, primarily for nonprofit organizations. She and her husband, Timothy, live in Lindstrom, MN.

Learn more about the Druffner family’s clean water initiatives and other support efforts in Tanzania — and how you can help — at partners4hopetanzania.org.
A Renaissance of Structure and Soul

Planning The Basilica’s future

Following the construction of the freeways near The Basilica in the 1960s, The Basilica of Saint Mary and surrounding residential neighborhoods were split apart. With the loss of nearby housing, The Basilica’s membership plummeted; The Basilica School shut its doors due to lack of enrollment; and The Basilica and campus buildings descended into disrepair.

According to architectural historian Carol Frenning, “[w]all and wooden support beams were soggy and rotten with water damage. Only four of over one hundred supports that connected The Basilica’s three cement floors were intact...[and] the rose windows were actually holding the supporting walls, not the other way around.

Something had to be done.

Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the seeds of a renaissance for The Basilica began to take root. Membership grew, programs were revitalized, and interest in The Basilica increased.

After decades of neglect, the full extent of the damage was assessed and restoration began. The Basilica Landmark, formerly known as The Friends of The Basilica of Saint Mary Foundation, was founded in 1993 to help with urgent restoration efforts.

With the restoration of the dome underway, Peter Crain — current Basilica Landmark Board member and Chair of The Basilica’s Facilities Committee — was married at The Basilica in 1991 amidst scaffolding necessitated by the restoration efforts.

Shortly thereafter, Peter joined The Basilica’s Facilities Assessment Committee. The committee focused on emergency repairs and started to develop a long-term plan for the maintenance of The Basilica and its campus.

One of the challenges facing the Facilities Committee — in addition to the lack of funds and years of neglect — was maintaining and restoring the historic structures on The Basilica’s campus and keeping them functional for the community without compromising the buildings’ original aesthetic.

Luckily, Peter was well-suited to this work. With a minor in architecture and fifteen years of experience as an art teacher working with sculpture and ceramics, Peter had
honored an excellent sense of aesthetics. Moreover, as President of Trestle Custom Homes, Peter has restored many turn-of-the-century homes; work in which he finds himself dealing with many of the same issues that The Basilica faces.

But just because there was a committee, didn’t make their challenges any smaller. There was very little money; the dome restoration was in debt; and it was a struggle to find funds, Crain remarked. In those early years, the Facilities Committee was only able to plan about three years out, and the goal of the Committee was merely to maintain.

The revitalization of the parish and the generosity of the community, however, allowed the Facilities Committee to slowly evolve into what it is today. Now, the Facilities Committee works with ten year plans and focuses not only on The Basilica’s immediate critical needs, but other preservation and restoration projects as well.

Each spring, members of the Facilities Committee walk the campus and all the buildings with Basilica staff members who work in each building. Together the Facilities Committee members and Basilica staff members enumerate the multitude of issues that need to be addressed. In addition, the Facilities Committee inspects all the roofs on The Basilica campus twice a year.

Aiding the Facilities Committee in its work, and providing additional expertise are a number of external partners such as Mortenson Construction, which attends all the Facilities Committee’s meetings, and Miller Dunwiddie Architecture, which provides advice with respect to the historical aspects of maintaining, preserving, and restoring The Basilica.

After the Facilities Committee develops the list of short and long-term projects, the members begin the difficult task of prioritizing and scheduling the projects. Projects that are necessary to maintain the safety of the buildings are given the highest priority; followed by projects that need to be done to prevent more damage from occurring.

Peter noted that, so many things have to happen; but immediate needs must still be addressed first. Some of these things aren’t glamorous, but they are necessary.

Indeed, it takes about $300,000 annually simply to maintain The Basilica’s buildings and grounds. After these categories are addressed, the Facilities Committee recommends larger projects that need to be completed; some recent examples of such projects included the renovation of the fourth floor of the Rectory, and the tuck-pointing of the bell towers, which will continue this summer. In addition to all these concerns, the Facilities Committee is careful to try and schedule projects so as not to ask too much of the community all at once.

All this careful planning, scrutinizing, and prioritizing is yielding extraordinary results.

Today, The Basilica Landmark has moved beyond just urgent repairs from their mission in 1993 to a new and updated mission to preserve, restore, and advance the historic Basilica of Saint Mary for all generations.

When asked how the community can support these restoration efforts, Peter recommends that people support The Basilica Landmark financially; attend events like The Basilica Landmark Ball and the Block Party; talk up events; solicit friends; and get non-Catholics involved.

Peter stressed that financial support, while important, is not the only thing that is required to ensure the Facilities Committee and The Basilica Landmark succeed in the mission to preserve, restore, and advance The Basilica.

It is also critically important that people remain active and involved in the parish community.

The flourishing of the community and our restoration efforts go hand in hand, Peter said. Look what was happening in the 70s; membership was low and the building was neglected; you need parishioners or you can’t have any restoration. It is our open and vibrant community that will ensure our efforts are sustainable.

These are historic and exciting times for The Basilica.

As Peter stated, The Basilica is experiencing a renaissance, not only of its physical structures and buildings, but of the community as well.

With the continued support of The Basilica community, Peter’s dream to one day attend Mass in The Basilica that is restored to its original grandeur can be a reality for us all.

P. Joshua Hill is an attorney practicing in the areas of civil litigation, estate planning, and alternative dispute resolution. He and his wife, Jodi, are parishioners and active volunteers at The Basilica.
Open Wide Your Doors

The Holy Year of Mercy

On March 13, 2015, Pope Francis announced that the year 2016 was to be a Holy Year of Jubilee dedicated to mercy. He stated that it was his hope that during this year we rediscover the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as we commit ourselves to live by mercy so as to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness from God who excludes no one.

Pope Francis inaugurated the Holy Year of Mercy by opening the Holy Doors at Saint Peter’s Basilica on December 8, 2015. I just happened to be in Rome for a meeting of the Vatican Art and Technology Council and was absolutely thrilled to receive VIP access to the celebration. As we made our way to the appointed entrance, I called my contact to confirm our access. She told me that our VIP tickets should do the trick. “What tickets?” I asked. “Oh no, had we not picked them up the day before?” she replied. We had not. It became clear that we missed out on our VIP access. The irony that this happened when we were there to celebrate the opening of the Holy Doors was not lost on us.

Standing in the rain I looked at the crowds around us and thought it best to return to the hotel where we could watch the Mass on TV. One of my travel companions offered to buy me a coffee. He gently nudged me not to give up and suggested that we wait in line and enter with the many other people who had no tickets. Admittedly, I did not look forward to joining thousands of people waiting in line to squeeze through tiny security gates under the scrutinizing eye of Italian police. Nevertheless, we walked back to the Via della Conciliazione and joined the thousands of other pilgrims who either forgot to pick up their tickets or never got any.

As we waited in line, we recited the Rosary and sang the Salve Regina with the people around us. When we finally made it through security, we had to stand in the very back of St. Peter’s square. The opening of the Holy Doors happened at the end of Mass. Apart from the cardinals and a few select bishops, all of us watched the opening of the Holy Doors on the giant screens around the square. When Pope Francis finally opened the Holy Doors, a thunderous and sustained applause erupted through Saint Peter’s Square only to be followed by a profound silence as the Pope prayed at the threshold of the Holy Door. He stood there for many moments steeped in prayer. Then he walked through the Holy Door to more applause.

I never made it through the Holy Door. There simply were too many people and rather than first I was now last in line. As I watched cardinals and bishops, presidents and diplomats walk through the Holy Doors I found myself praying for the many people who experience the harsh reality of closed doors. Sometimes these closed doors can be literal doors — doors to homes, doors to work opportunities, doors to hospitals, even doors to churches. These can also be
symbolic doors: obstacles such as war, famine, inequality, which prevent people from accessing needed opportunities. And these can be spiritual and emotional barriers. There simply are too many closed doors in our world. And as time goes by it seems like more and more doors are being closed to more and more people. Maybe there was a reason I missed out on those VIP tickets?

Recognizing the importance of Holy Doors, Pope Francis asked all cathedrals throughout the world to designate a set of doors as Holy Doors. His intention was to avail the experience of a Holy Door to all people, not just those able to travel to Rome. On Sunday, December 13, we opened our Basilica Holy Doors. And this time I did not stand in the back, but rather sat in front. Most importantly, I was able to walk through our Holy Doors with every single person who was in attendance that morning. It was a deeply moving experience.

To be sure, there is nothing magic about walking through a Holy Door, rather, this is a profoundly symbolic and spiritual act. All of us share in the human experience of opened and closed doors. On one hand, doors mark thresholds and provide pathways. On the other hand, doors can present barriers and block access. Our most poignant biblical experience of doors relates to the Doors of Hell and the Gates to Paradise. After the Fall, Adam and Eve were chased out of Paradise and the gates were closed behind them. It was not until Christ broke the doors of Hell and opened the Gates to paradise that we were restored to Heaven. Christ is our Gate to Heaven, our doorway to Salvation. In His own words, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.” (John 10:9)

When we walk through the Holy Doors, we celebrate that Christ is the Door to Mercy and the Gate to Paradise. At the same time, we embrace his life’s mission as our own and commit ourselves to live lives of mercy and to open wide the doors to our countries, our cities, our homes, and our hearts, especially to those most in need. This is not an easy task, but it is one that must be embraced for the sake of the church and the well-being of all people. So, please join the thousands of people who have walked through the Holy Doors at The Basilica of Saint Mary to celebrate God’s mercy and commit yourselves to acts of mercy in turn.

Johan M. J. van Parys, Ph.D., has been The Basilica’s director of liturgy and sacred arts since 1995. He has published numerous articles and lectures throughout the country. His books include Symbols that Surround Us and What’s the Smoke for? And Other Burning Questions about the Liturgy, a collection of all previous Ask Johan columns.
“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22: 6). Helping children grow in their faith is one of the most important ministries of our church. For those who like working with children, it is also one of the most rewarding.

Gennifer Heuisler, who teaches third, fourth, and fifth grades, has been a volunteer catechist for over 15 years and has experienced the rewards of this ministry first-hand. “During my classroom time, we often talk about our creed and what it means to be apostolic or to ‘go in faith to love and serve the Lord.’ With our purpose to be servants of God, the kids are inspired and challenged to use their talents to help others in unique ways. The kids prove that this is possible at any age, every year.”

The catechesis program at The Basilica is available for children ages 3 through high school, so volunteers who enjoy working with children at varying ages are needed. The curriculum is liturgically based and is structured by the Children’s Ministry to offer guidelines for catechists to follow. Heuisler also notes that her fellow catechist teachers work together and share ideas for creating fun classroom ideas for the children.

While working with a classroom of children can be challenging at times, Heuisler has experienced her own faith grow through participation as a catechist. “What fascinates me the most each year is the child’s perspective of God and the depth of faith each child holds in their heart. Some of the children I have taught have incredibly complex understandings of God and amazing faith. They, in turn, have helped me contemplate more about my own faith every year.”

Another catechist who has served at The Basilica for many years is Kevina Munnich. Munnich primarily teaches second grade but has served other ages as well. Teaching is an opportunity for her to pass on the faith to a new generation. “I think it’s the children who keep me coming back. Giving them an environment rich in ritual where they are free to ask questions — amazing what they hear — and just relax in a non-competitive environment.”

And while there are many long-term volunteer catechists, more teachers are needed, explained Munnich. “Teachers are hard to come by. If you want to bring your religious beliefs to children, there is a curriculum. I have been happy to mentor new teachers and work the curriculum to their style.”

Carolina Branson is a parishioner who works as a freelance writer and college instructor. She enjoys spending time with her husband and two young daughters.
When Monsignor Terrance Berntson took the helm as our rector in February 1973, The Basilica had two socially-oriented programs — the school and CCD, otherwise known as religious education. For parishioners without children, the church had little to offer besides Sunday Mass.

Monsignor Berntson knew the school would likely be closing soon, and freeway construction had cut a swath through The Basilica’s neighborhoods. In this post-Vatican II era, he wanted to unite the parish and to involve as many people as possible in promoting the greater good of the community. His answer: The Basilica Care Guild.

Founded in early 1974, the Care Guild was organized into five standing committees:

**Membership and Parish Newcomers:** Led by Marilyn Gooley and Roslyn Daly, these volunteers visited new families with information packets and hosted get-acquainted parties.

**Social Action:** Chaired by Mary Hannon and Karen Harrison, who noted in a 2011 interview, “We were very serious about the social action on the one hand, actually doing the doing, and the social justice issues, more about the philosophy.” Assisting the priest and parish social worker, Kathy Cox, they organized the emergency food program and the Service Resource Bank, which linked handy volunteers with parishioners in need. The sandwich program also saw its start here, with the help of the Omegas seniors group.

**Fundraising and Parish Projects:** Chaired by Mary Kay Strei and Anne Fitch, this committee organized rummage and bake sales and sponsored the Sunday hospitality and babysitting services. In its first year, the Guild provided a $2,000 gift to the parish from its fundraising efforts.

**Volunteer Visiting for Hospitals, Nursing Homes, and the Homebound:** Chairperson Mary Delaney and her team organized visitors “to people who may be depressed, lonely, or fearful — to help them in tangible ways, as well as psychologically and spiritually.”

**Spiritual and Cultural Enrichment:** Led by co-chairpersons Sr. Bernadine Cable and Alice Henderson, the committee organized book discussions, adult education programs, retreats, tours, concerts, and produced a monthly parish calendar.

**Board members oversaw the Guild as a whole:** Barbara Gillham, president; Dorothy Clarkson, vice president; Sue Trebtoske, secretary; and Alicia Brick, treasurer. While the initial constitution of the guild specified a membership open only to parish women, this restriction was soon eliminated and men were welcomed into the ranks.

In the December 1974 parish newsletter, Msgr. Berntson expressed his hopes for the fledgling Care Guild: “These are people in the parish who are working with human beings, with life lived in a world full of both happiness and sorrow. The members of the Care Guild as well as our social worker are not philosophers, anthropologists, or students of the abstract human condition. Their work is immersed in the business of people. Their labors, therefore, are truly incarnational — flesh and blood.”

The Care Guild was disbanded as an organization in 1995, primarily because so many of its ministries and programs had taken on a life of their own. In 2015, over 2,800 Basilica volunteers contributed their time and energy to the business of people. I think Msgr. Berntson would be proud.

Heather Craig is the archivist for The Basilica.
Good Souls Working for Good Soles

The Basilica’s Shoe Ministry

MaryAnn Johnson poses for a photo at her workstation during St. Vincent de Paul Shoe and Outreach Ministry. Johnson is a regular volunteer who meets with individuals to help find appropriate services and resources.

Many of us take shoes for granted. In fact, there are people who have closets lined with dozens of pairs of shoes. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to struggle to have just one pair? Have you ever considered what life would be like if you didn’t have solid, reliable shoes while living in a state where our weather fluctuates by the day, where for half of the year our bodies risk harm if exposed half the year?

The Basilica of Saint Mary Shoe Ministry, a part of the St. Vincent de Paul Outreach Ministry at The Basilica, works with people every week who consider themselves lucky to have one good pair of shoes.

Since 1988, the Shoe Ministry has provided over 200,000 pairs of shoes to children and families in need. Families and individuals can show up at the Shoe Ministry, administered out of the Teresa of Calcutta Hall at The Basilica, and receive shoe vouchers that can be redeemed at the Lake Street K-Mart in Minneapolis.

Those in need can get one shoe voucher per year. While a good, reliable pair of shoes is critical for a person’s safety, comfort, and well-being — particularly for someone living in Minnesota — the Shoe Ministry provides so much more than a voucher for a pair of shoes.

No one understands this more than parishioner MaryAnn Johnson, who has volunteered with The Basilica’s Shoe Ministry for more than four years.

When a person — man, woman, or child — comes to the Shoe Ministry, the volunteers conduct an inventory of sorts. Among other things, they have to verify if the individual qualifies for the benefits of the program. This verification includes a set of criteria as well as an ID and proof of residence in certain zip codes within Minneapolis.

The inventory also provides valuable insight into their lives, and allows volunteers who work in the Shoe Ministry the ability to assess in what other areas the person could receive support.

Frequently recipients of the Shoe Ministry are struggling in numerous areas of their lives, and the shoes they lack are representative of many other things they might need. The inventory enables volunteers to determine in what other ways they can assist each individual.

For example, some people don’t have access to reliable transportation, or they may not be able to afford gas even if they do own a car. In these cases, a pass for public transportation or a gas card could provide tremendous relief.

In other cases, someone might be struggling to find a job. Volunteers can steer recipients to other resources like Pathways, which are life-skills classes offered weekly at The Basilica. Other ministries within The Basilica can assist with life-skills coaching, mentoring, networking, and job searching.
Perhaps an individual doesn’t have enough food to eat, or has a job interview but does not have the appropriate attire to wear to the interview. The Shoe Ministry volunteers can support them in these ways as well. There is also information available about other community programs and resources. No matter the need, information and help can almost always be found.

Johnson has encountered people who “are scared, living in fear, struggling with mental illness, and who are suffering” in her years of volunteering with this particular ministry at The Basilica.

Aside from the aforementioned services, some individuals, according to Johnson, simply want to have a conversation, want to pray, or just need comfort to relieve some of the anxiety they face from the overwhelming circumstances in their lives.

While they may initially come for a voucher to receive a new pair of shoes, volunteers like Johnson hope those in need leave with far more.

It is the desire to expand the Shoe Ministry’s capacity to help people that drove Johnson to seek an amazing opportunity through her employer last fall, one that could dramatically impact the Shoe Ministry’s reach.

Johnson, who is a Project Implementation Lead with the Feed & Nutrition division of Cargill, was approached by a colleague last fall regarding a grant opportunity provided through Cargill’s Annual Giving Campaign. Her colleague suggested Johnson nominate the Shoe Ministry for the campaign, which provides grants to nonprofit organizations, among other things.

Soon after, Johnson learned that the Shoe Ministry would receive a $10,000 grant from Cargill because it was chosen as a sponsored community partner. She was thrilled with the “opportunity to use the funds for a greater good.”

Cargill is among a number of organizations in the Twin Cities who are committed to supporting organizations that are important to their employees within the broader community.

Deeply grateful for what this donation from Cargill will mean for the Shoe Ministry, Johnson reflected on the even deeper impact the Shoe Ministry could make if additional individuals or organizations contributed to the ministry’s work.

Johnson said working with the Shoe Ministry has taught her the importance of giving back through financial stewardship and volunteering. She acknowledges that this work is not always easy, but she “frequently has a situation that touches [her] heart” every time she volunteers and is motivated by “people who still see God, even in the midst of suffering.”

The next time you slip on a pair of shoes and prepare to leave your home, reflect on those who consider one good pair of shoes a luxury. How could you help those in need, either through financial stewardship or volunteer work? Do you work for an organization which might consider contributing to our community through causes that are near and dear to your heart? When individuals and organizations come together to improve our communities, the possibilities are endless. Imagine that.

Ann T. Deiman Thornton has been a member of the Basilica for 15 years and is a resident of North Minneapolis, deeply concerned about making our community a better place.
When asked how we would each like to spend the last few hours of our life before death, it seems nearly all of us would say, “at home, surrounded by those we love most.”

At home. Surrounded by those we love most.

There’s beauty in this vision. It is home where we spend so much of our time. We watch children take their first steps. We gather around a table for meals. We make memories and live life together.

Naturally the home is also where we would like to end our life, surrounded with those who have helped make our lives beautiful.

But the reality is, very few of us will ever die in this way. For some, death is sudden and abrupt, leaving no time to gather the loved ones. For others, dying is accompanied with hospital stays and nursing home care.

But for those battling a long illness or working to recovery from a surgery, home care is possible. And often times, it is a hospice nurse who makes it possible.

Leo Guzman, a parishioner at The Basilica, does exactly that. He cares for the sick and dying as a hospice nurse, enabling families and their loved one to rest, recover, or — in some cases — pass peacefully in their own home.

“I facilitate people to be at home,” said Guzman. “I help support patients and families in their homes.”

The value of being at home means the ability to control at least some of your environment and lifestyle.

“The patient and family gets to call the shots; the nurses are there to help facilitate,” said Guzman. “Being at home means you’re not at the whim of other people’s schedules. Not waking up in the night. Noises. Drips. It’s still nice to come back home.”

It was this level of home care during an extended illness of a loved one that inspired Guzman to pursue hospice as his own life’s work.

In 1993, Leo took care of a loved one who was dying of AIDS.

“I was terrified. But I did it anyway,” said Guzman.

While Leo was providing care at their
home, the hospice nurses who helped in that difficult time left him inspired.

“They were witnesses to me without even knowing. These folks are really something else,” Guzman added. “The hospice nurses showed me by their witness that this was very useful, helpful, and sacred work.”

This care for the sick — this ministry — is truly sacred work for us all, the entire Body of Christ. Each person is called to care for the sick, who are children of God and part of the human family.

For Leo, this call also meant a new life’s work. He soon realized that the witness he saw through his own experience left him inspired to pursue hospice as his new profession.

“It took about 10 years but I went back to school,” said Guzman. “It took time, it took the emotional intelligence.” But in that time he was able to begin again.

After years of training, he was certified as a hospice nurse and now spends his time serving patients and families in the same way he was once served — not as the hero, but as the facilitator, coming in solidarity.

“As opposed to coming in and being the rescuer, I encourage the family to be there and hold the patient’s hand and do those things they can do,” he said.

“When Mike was dying, a nurse said to sit with him and hold him. And I did,” said Guzman. “[The nurse] could have done that. But she had me do it. It has always stuck with me and now I always ask, ‘How can I make that possible?’ to facilitate the saying goodbye.”

To some, this might seem like daunting work. And sometimes, it is.

“Some people are angry and they fight, but we meet with them too,” added Guzman.

He meets them because he’s been there himself.

“I see in them my own story. After the period of intense grief and depression, that recovery,” said Guzman. “I can reach a hand back. I can say, ‘Come, I’ve done this. I know you can have a fruitful life even after this experience.’”

But for Leo, it doesn’t matter who he is serving and where that family or individual is in the grief process or even faith journey, he finds hope and inspiration in one thing.

“I serve people in North Oaks and North Minneapolis, the poor and the wealthy,” said Guzman. “It doesn’t matter if I’m caring for a Muslim or Catholic or whatever, the resurrection and rebirth is what keeps me going.”

Even with this inspiration in mind, caring for the sick is filled with its ups and downs. And yet, he wants to remind us it is never a burden, but a gift.

“I tell the families, ‘This will be useful to you one day. I don’t know how and I don’t know when, but it will be useful.’”

For Leo, it was useful in guiding him to his passion in life. But for each of us, it is a reminder of how we can each serve one another.

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”

Stacy Glaus is the director of communications and marketing at The Basilica of Saint Mary.
Finding Humanity

Visit the imprisoned for three decades

Something we are all guilty of, in one way or another, is putting other people in boxes. We take one look at someone, or hear one detail of his or her story, and before we’ve learned this person’s name they’ve already been sorted under the various labels in our minds. We do this because, when it comes down to it, all of us feel that our own judgments are the most pure—that “we know best.” And so we almost always find it convenient when society puts certain people in a very literal box for us; few labels hold as much sway in our opinion of another person as the term “prisoner.”

The Basilica’s Fr. Greg Skrypek spent thirty years making a ministry of visiting the imprisoned. There are many obvious ways that our basic concept of “mercy” can be connected to prison ministry, and on this basic level we wouldn’t even need Fr. Skrypek to tell us about it; the idea of a priest visiting guilty men and helping with their examinations of conscience is easy to picture. He’s there to “reform” them, show them the errors in their ways, help them become “good” again while they pay their state-issued debt to our country. This, to our Catholic minds so well versed in thinking about guilt, is straightforward. But in this Year of Mercy instituted by a Pope who is constantly asking us to look deeper, it isn’t good enough. And in examining the work of Fr. Skrypek, it’s clear that the lessons of prison ministry should stretch our ideas about mercy in crucial ways.

In talking with him, Fr. Skrypek began by establishing a key concept of his prison ministry: he never asked why any inmate he spoke with was imprisoned. It would come up in discussion sometimes, sure, but he refused to let that signifier be the starting point in what he intended to be a real relationship with another person. The conviction was never more important than the person, a simple idea that seems incredibly rare when considering how a person with a conviction on his record is treated by the world for the rest of his life, even after completing a jail sentence. In fact, Fr. Skrypek took it a step further; when it came to connecting with prisoners, followed a practice that cuts right to the heart of what mercy truly is: as he put it to me, “I would not say anything until I found myself in that person.”

It’s easy for us to see ourselves in the people we love and admire, or even just like. Usually this is a practice that makes us proud of ourselves, in some way. Maybe a
VISIT THE IMPRISONED

child displays some virtue we taught him or her, or maybe we read some passage of the gospel and can feel for a moment as though we’ve been putting into practice some lesson Christ teaches the apostles. But a convict? A person who on the surface is defined by his guilt? That’s trickier. It’s humbling. It’s an act that would force us to confront the parts of ourselves we’d rather sweep under the rug, or expose only in the confessional.

But on the flip side, searching for yourself in a prisoner would also force you to find the redeeming pieces you wouldn’t otherwise be looking for in that person, and at the end of the process you’d be left with a complex view of both yourself and another, a view that defies easy labels, a view that forces us to see a person as a person. And so maybe this is what real mercy is: recognizing true humanity in others, and acting accordingly.

Fr. Skrypek had many difficult and poignant conversations during his time as the Chaplain of Stillwater Prison. This sort of ministry confronts the darkest sides of the way people grapple with sin and temptation, guilt and denial, and it could conceivably be alluring to stay separate from it, to close ourselves off. These people are on the other side of some thick walls, after all. But really, aren’t these some of the most human ideas we have? And couldn’t it be said that no population examines its own conscience quite as thoroughly as the imprisoned? That, we would all agree, is a virtue. And to recognize that virtue or any other in someone we’d normally cast aside is the sort of practice that lies directly at the heart of this Year of Mercy we’re now contemplating. It’s an act that stretches our empathy when we don’t necessarily want it to stretch.

These were hard years for Fr. Skrypek. A prison is a prison; there are people inside it that are beyond difficult to understand, and it’s an unforgiving environment that often stands at odds with any kind of ministry, let alone his. But for three decades he kept at it and held true to his principle of finding the humanity in every last person he met with. In the end, this proved fruitful, both for him and for many of those he connected with in Stillwater. As we wrapped up, Fr. Skrypek told me that a former prisoner, now free, had called to catch up just the night before. This person had been transformed by mercy, the real kind, and to watch the joy in Fr. Skrypek’s eyes as he talked about it suggests that he’d been transformed too.

And to me, that’s really the crux of this Year of Mercy: as much as being merciful has the power to affect the lives of others, the act itself can transform the giver just as much. Fr. Greg Skrypek spent much of his life finding himself in the hearts of prisoners. By doing so he recognized their complex humanity, which, being the flawed yet vibrant people we all are, is the most merciful thing we can do for one another.

Erik Hane is a writer, editor, and literary agent based in Minneapolis, new to both the parish and the Twin Cities. He can be reached at erikstevenhane@gmail.com.
Setting the Stage

A choir for more than just voices

Each Monday at noon, in a small alcove at Central Lutheran Church in downtown Minneapolis, a group of individuals from all walks of life gather for a meeting. Some of these people are homeless. Some have been homeless. Some are parishioners at downtown parishes. But they all care about those who are homeless and find inspiration in making music — together. This group of people collectively forms one of the newest choirs in town: StreetSong-MN.

StreetSong-MN, a choir for the homeless, those who have experienced homelessness, and people who care about ending homelessness, is an initiative of the Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness (DCEH). Led by Teri Larson, director of music at The Basilica, and Bill Mathis, director of music at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, the choir currently rehearses weekly at Central Lutheran Church.

And while its formal beginnings date back to 2013, the idea originated long before.

“I was reading a journal article about community choirs,” said Larson, “and it happened to mention homeless choirs. I pondered the idea for months and it wouldn’t let me go.”

After reflecting on it further, Larson brought the idea to The Basilica’s director of Christian Life, Janice Andersen. Andersen, who represents The Basilica within the DCEH organization, realized it was a perfect fit for the Minneapolis community.

“It turned out that DCEH was seeking more daytime activities for the homeless community,” added Larson. “I emailed the other downtown congregations and Bill immediately jumped on board.”

DCEH is an interfaith collaboration of 13 downtown Minneapolis churches, synagogues, and mosques working together to end homelessness and poverty. StreetSong-MN, as an interfaith-initiative, was a clear addition to their ongoing work.

“The Downtown Congregations to End Homelessness and Bill and I developed a mission statement and a plan of action,” said Larson.

And StreetSong-MN was born. StreetSong-MN aims to unite all voices for harmony and community — skill level and ability is no barrier to join this choir.

“There are so many people of varying abilities,” said Larson. “At our very beginning, even matching a pitch was difficult for some. There are no competitions or egos here; we all just experience the joy of being together and creating community through music.”

By Stacy Glaus
In addition to skill level and experience, there is something else unique about the group of individuals who make StreetSong-MN a whole.

“There is just something about this choir that brightens my day,” said Larson. “On even the most stressful days, I always leave StreetSong-MN feeling inspired.”

This sense of inspiration is apparent in the members of StreetSong-MN, too. StreetSong-MN draws on the experiences, hopes, and aspirations of its members to produce a choral experience promoting personal fulfillment and the development of community.

“StreetSong-MN is not only inspirational for me but also to the audience — it is very uplifting,” said Roshell “Ro” Shanklin, StreetSong-MN member and bass in the choir. “I grew up hearing music and the thing I always noticed was that if someone was having a rough day, it seemed to bring a smile to their face.”

Shanklin is also inspired by his fellow choir members.

“I like the fellowship of meeting new people and to think that through music, we can change things,” added Shanklin. “Even that one song can make a difference.”

For others, the sense of community that also provides inspiration and joy.

“I was homeless for five months,” said Tria Rouse, a soprano in StreetSong-MN. “Before that, I have been homeless on and off for probably the past eight years. This is the tightest community I have and I need community right now.”

But the inspiration is not only found in the choir members, but in the community. And StreetSong-MN is about to bring this inspiration to a grand stage — the Ordway Center for the Performing Arts in downtown St. Paul.

In the fall of 2015, StreetSong-MN partnered with Cantus, a nine-member, men’s vocal ensemble that performs around the world, for a special performance opportunity. This partnership led Cantus and StreetSong-MN to a two-show spring concert entitled “Would you Harbor Me?” and included performances at the Ordway and the Minneapolis Central Library.

The concerts’ goal was to give voice to personal stories of crisis, homelessness, resilience, isolation, belonging, and community through a program that delivered a universal message of hope and inspiration through music.

“Partnering with Cantus allowed StreetSong-MN to bring the issue of homelessness to a much larger stage — literally,” said Larson. “We were thrilled to be a small part of this concert series to help shed light on the goal of ending homelessness.”

The members of StreetSong-MN were also excited and grateful for this unique opportunity.

“Not only did we get to sing with this excellent group, but to sing on that stage [the Ordway],” said Shanklin. “It was a really humbling and beautiful experience that I’ll remember for the rest of my life.”

In addition to their collaboration with Cantus, StreetSong-MN also partnered with the Minneapolis Community and Technical College choir for a spring 2016 concert.

For details on these events and more, visit StreetSong-MN’s website at dceh.org.

Stacy Glaus is the director of communications at The Basilica of Saint Mary.
Today, there are several options for a Catholic upon their death. Historically, Catholic burial excluded the option of cremation, due in large part to wanting to distance ourselves from the pagan rituals of Ancient Rome. While the Church has relaxed its rules regarding cremation, allowing for the ashes to be blessed during funeral Mass, the preference is still to have the body present for the mass, with cremation taking place after the service.

“The funeral Mass is a very important part of the grieving process. Having the body lets people relate to their lost loved one,” added van Parys. “We relate to a body in a different way than ashes in an urn.”

However, the presence of an urn with ashes, versus a body, present for the funeral Mass is on the rise.

One of the most important events in our lives as Catholics is often the one overlooked. Death. No one likes to think about it, or the arrangements that must be made. But it’s important to plan for our final transition.

The funeral Mass is an important event in the Christian journey. For those departing, it’s a commendation to God and celebration of their life. For those mourning, it’s an event to bring closure.

“It’s very important to try to do this well, both for those who pass away and for those left behind. The Basilica is here to assist in whatever way we can help,” said Johan van Parys, director of Liturgy and Sacred Arts at The Basilica.

One of the services The Basilica offers is Funeral Planning Workshops. “The idea is to plan in your life for important events. You plan for trips, your wedding, baptisms, and your transition at the end,” said van Parys.

Planning for a funeral Mass can take the burden off loved ones during a traumatic time. They will know their loved one’s preferences and that can help to know they are fulfilling last wishes.

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Coni Beisker and her husband John Leonard, parishioners of The Basilica, regularly volunteer to serve during funeral masses at The Basilica.

“In the funerals I have served for over the last several years at The Basilica, I would estimate approximately 50/50 regarding caskets vs. urns,” said Beisker. “In the past
few years I would say the trend is for more and more of our Catholic community to choose cremation.”

After the funeral Mass, it’s time to lay the remains to rest. Burying the body is important in the Catholic Church. The historical custom of burying our dead goes back to the beginnings of Christianity as not only a way to distinguish Christians from the pagan practices of Rome, but also an important element in the Christian belief of the resurrection of the body. Additionally, burying the dead leaves a defined place on earth that allows those left behind to visit.

“It’s important to have a place where one can go to mourn,” said Van Parys.

Whether one choses to be cremated or not, it is of the utmost importance to remember that the cremated remains are to be treated with the same respect as the body of a deceased person is treated.

“This is why the Catholic Church insists that cremated remains are buried or placed in a mausoleum. The spreading of ashes is not part of the Catholic tradition. The proper burial of a loved one’s remains is part of the grieving process both honoring and celebrating the memory of the deceased,” said van Parys.

“My belief is that the religious and historical significance of funerals is the dual role of the celebration of life and the honoring of the deceased,” said Beisker.

It’s important during times of loss for the community to come together in support. Coni and her husband John often serve during funerals together.

“It is such an honor to listen to the eulogies, to hear family and friends speak of their loved ones,” added Beisker with her husband, John. “In a very small way, to hope we contributed to honoring the deceased and celebrating the very special life of their loved one.”

Their service honors those who have gone before and they are comforted knowing their community will be there to support them.

“It brings great comfort to know when it is my time, or my loved one, that The Basilica community will be there to honor and celebrate our lives,” they said. “It is done with such dignity and reverence.”

The Basilica seeks to support its members during difficult times and also offers grieving ministries.

Emmaus Ministers spend time with those grieving, to make sure they are okay. The Basilica also offers Grief Coalitions the grieving can join. Every November 2 The Basilica holds a Vespers for All Souls day. Anyone can come to mourn a lost loved one, particularly those who passed in the previous year.

Additionally, The Basilica offers Prayer Shawl Ministries. These shawls are knit and prayed over and given to those who are sick or grieving. It is a physical representation of the support and love The Basilica community is offering them in their time of grief and struggle.

“It’s a symbolic hug,” said van Parys.

So far, The Basilica has given out more than 1,000 Prayer Shawls.

Regardless of what stage of planning you’re entering into, The Basilica is here to help. Take the time and set aside the discomfort of planning the funeral so your loved ones don’t have to. Whether you are considering burial or cremation, the workshops will guide you in choosing an appropriate and respectful way to be laid to rest.

*BASILICA / SPRING 2016 29*
Dear Johan,

I have heard so much about the Year of Mercy but am unclear about what it is. Any thoughts?

Gentle Reader,

On March 13, 2015, during the homily for a Lenten Penance Service, Pope Francis stated that he “often thought about how the church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with spiritual conversion.” To the surprise of all those present, he went on to say “For this reason, I have decided to call an Extraordinary Jubilee that is to have the mercy of God as its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this year in the light of the Lord’s words: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (Lk. 6:36).”

The spiritual practice of a Holy Year or a Year of Jubilee is rooted in Judaism. As described in Leviticus 25:8-13, a Holy Year of Jubilee is all about righting relationships. It is a time to right your relationship with God, re-establishing that everything comes from God and belongs to God. It is also a time of righting relationships with one another by striving for peace, justice, and equality.

The first documented Catholic Year of Jubilee was called by Pope Boniface VIII the year 1300. Referencing the Jewish custom, which had not been honored since the diaspora, the Pope granted “not only full and copious, but the most full, pardon of all their sins,” to those who “being truly penitent confess their sins, and visit the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul in Rome, at least once a day for a period of 30 days for Romans and 15 for visitors.” He also decreed that a year of Jubilee was to be held every 100 years.

Between 1300 and 1475 several Popes declared a Holy Year at different intervals. Since 1475 there has been a Holy Year every 25 years unless prevented or interrupted by war. In addition, we have had several extraordinary Holy Years such as the Holy Year of Jubilee in Commemoration of the death of Jesus declared by Pope Pius XI in 1933 and the Holy Year of Redemption declared by Saint John Paul II in 1983. Pope Francis declared the first extra-ordinary Holy Year of the 21st century and dedicated it to Mercy.

A major component of the celebration of a Holy Year has always been a pilgrimage to Rome. Pope Francis made the all-important pilgrimage more accessible by declaring that those who could not make it to Rome could make a pilgrimage to their local cathedral or to a church designated as a pilgrimage church by the local bishop. For those who could not even do that, e.g. those in prison or in hospital, Pope Francis suggested they make a spiritual pilgrimage. He went even further by asking all cathedrals to designate their very own Holy Doors so as to make this spiritual exercise available to all.

In order for a Holy Year to be fruitful, pilgrims are asked to participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation and the Eucharist in addition to praying for the intentions of the Holy Father. Finally, pilgrims walk through a Holy door recognizing that Christ is the Door of Mercy and commit themselves to works of mercy, both spiritual and corporal.
Take one dark and unusable attic space, add generous donors to The Basilica Landmark, sprinkle with vision, hard work and enthusiasm and before you know it, you have completely renovated the fourth floor of Reardon Rectory. Sounds easy, right? However, if you have ever watched one of those home improvement shows or done any remodeling yourself, you know what a daunting and time-consuming task a renovation can be. In fact, renovating the fourth floor was a goal for many years before being brought to fruition.

As with most well-designed projects, the project began with a clear goal. The renovation would mean that there would finally be a dedicated space for The Basilica’s art and archive collections. Keeping these collections safe from the ravages of time is vitally important to preserving the history of The Basilica. Because of the unique attributes and/or age of each piece, adding appropriate temperature and humidity controls, fire protection, and efficient storage was a priority.

Another important part of a successful project is to get the right people involved. In the summer of 2014, members of The Basilica’s staff worked closely with the architectural firm of Miller Dunwiddie Architecture to develop a plan. Many talented people were involved, including a team of architects, engineers, project managers, and construction managers. Basilica staff worked closely with other consultants to ensure there was proper storage for a large variety of items such as hanging art, crèches, sculptures, drawings, and church records. A special fire protection system needed to be added in the art and archives storage rooms that would release a gas instead of water in the event of fire. Moreover, all of these changes had to work within the context of the existing building.

Perhaps the biggest challenge in redesigning this space was the lack of accessibility. While there has been elevator access to the attic since 2013, there was only one stair-well connecting the fourth floor to the rest of the building, which did not meet building code standards. The design team and appropriate city officials vetted several options. Ultimately, a new one-story stair joining the third and fourth floors was built into the plan.

Kelly Mastin, one of the lead architects on the project, stated, “This was [a] good option because it reduced the cost and space of adding a new stair, and did not impact the exterior appearance of the Rectory.”

Construction began in the spring of 2015 and was completed at the end of the year. What began as large rooms with concrete floors and unpainted plaster walls was transformed into a beautiful and functional space. The fourth floor now boasts five offices, an accounting storage room, a restroom, mechanical rooms, and a copy area. However, the jewels in the crown are the three art and archive rooms. In addition to two state-of-the-art storage rooms, there is a workroom with a large layout table, workstations for staff and volunteers, and spaces for visitors to view items from the collections. While The Basilica staff may still be shaking the plaster dust out of their hair, the envisioned goal is now a reality. Thanks to The Basilica Landmark, the space is now being well utilized.

Susan Hansen is a Training and Development Specialist at a national law firm in Minneapolis.
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Join The Basilica Schola Cantorum on a rare excursion to Rome where they will be singing with the Sistine Chapel Choir for the closing Mass of the Holy Year of Mercy celebrated by Pope Francis in St. Peter’s Basilica.

In addition, visit St. Peter, the Sistine Chapel and the Vatican Museums as well as other important Christian sites and explore the ancient Roman locations such as the Forum and Colosseum. For more information visit www.mary.org, email jvanparys@mary.org or call 612.317.3454.

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MISSION STATEMENT

“The Basilica of Saint Mary is a community rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

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• Practice biblical stewardship • Share our faith with others in word and deed
• Pursue ecumenical and interfaith relationships • Extend Christian hospitality, and
• Rejoice in rich diversity.

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• Inspiring liturgies and sacred arts • Transforming life-long learning opportunities
• Engaging service to one another and justice for all.