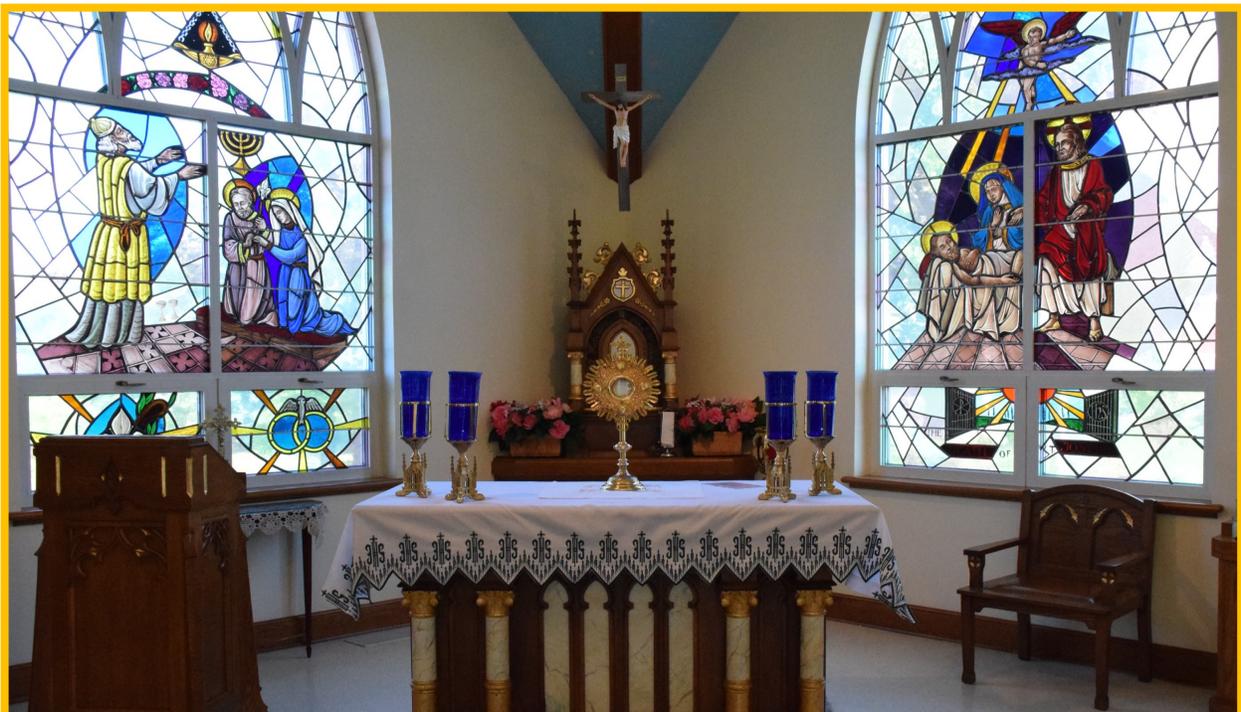


CROSS TALK

Finding Peace: Visiting the Chapel and Shrines of St. Helena





In this issue of Cross Talk we learn more about the Chapel and Shrines that are such key elements of the Saint Helena campus. We trace the history of the mission of the parish, its devotion to St. Theresa, the Little Flower, its dedication to provide sacred spaces for worship, education and meditation, and to offer different venues to find peace.

Winged angels at every entrance to the Saint Helena campus greet us and seem to harken us back to the image of a great multitude of heavenly hosts who welcome us to give glory to God and to protect us well as we go forth to spread the Good News!

We encourage you to visit the Chapel. Sign up for time for Adoration to the Blessed Sacrament. Spend time at one or more of the Shrines meditating on the significance of what they represent. Bring the family and say the rosary in the Rosary Garden. Dealing with a hectic day or family or work situation? Find peace devoting time praying in the presence of God and some truly remarkable saints who, like us, endured challenges and tough times but who remained faithful in their love and devotion to God.

The Saint Theresa Chapel is open Monday through Friday from 6:15AM to 9:00 PM; Saturday from 8:00AM to 6:00 PM ; and, Sunday from 7:00AM to 5:00 PM. Daily Mass is offered in the chapel Monday to Saturday at 9:00 AM. Adoration of the Most Blessed Sacrament is held in the Chapel Monday through Friday from 9:30AM to 7:30PM.

On the front cover:

- * Inside the Saint Theresa Chapel
- * Saint Helena statue outside the Rectory
- * The Holy Rosary Garden across from the Church

Table of Contents

	Page
Sacred Spaces ... Building Our Legacy	3
Great Shrine of the Little Flower, Centre Square	4
... In This Hour Show Us Your Power	5
Honoring The Blessed Mother and St. Joseph	6
Come Pray With Me	7
The Chapel Murals	8
This is Sacred Space	10
The Vision Continues . . . Beautification, Restoration, Enhancements	11
Special Remembrances	12
Eagle Scouts Respond	13
The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes	14
A Look to the Future	15

Sacred Spaces... Building Our Legacy

At St. Helena Parish we celebrate almost a century of rich history which defines our past, shapes our mission today, and serves as a foundation for our legacy into the future. Throughout our history, Saint Helena Parish has been blessed with abundant land and resources which foster a site where people can worship, learn, and find peace.



Our story began on October 1, 1919 when Cardinal Dougherty appointed a young priest, Father Francis Higgins, as pastor of a new parish in Montgomery County, Saint Helena, Center Square. Father Higgins was fascinated with the rich history of the area and was staunch in his efforts to build a vibrant parish in the midst of many acres of farmland. In just two years he captured the imagination of the small band of twenty five or thirty families with his deep devotion, hard work and dedication to his

mission. He started celebrating Mass in a borrowed farmhouse and quickly acquired land to build the first parish Church, a small rustic Chapel with leaded glass windows and a marble altar. In only three years the parish was self sufficient, no longer requiring subsidy from the diocese.

Throughout the initial development, Father Higgins was committed to maintaining the Church property as a sacred space. With a deep devotion to Saint Theresa, the Little Flower, and respect for the sprawling acres, he planted roses in her honor and initiated Sunday afternoon novena devotions. He canvassed the land to find spaces to add shrines and statues which enhanced the property. A life-like nativity scene announced the Christmas season each year.



Over the following years the Blue Bell area, once known as Pigeon Town, grew from a small rural parish of 25 families to the burgeoning parish we see today, home to over 2400 families. The original Church was replaced in 1952 but was considered temporary.

By the turn of the century it was time to build a new Church and expand the parish facilities and grounds. Under the direction of our current pastor, Monsignor Joseph J. Nicolo, the original mission and vision remained true - to provide indoor and outdoor spaces to worship, learn and find peace.

Today Saint Helena's parishioners enjoy buildings with exquisite stained glass windows, magnificent murals and liturgical artwork which celebrate our faith and help to tell the history of salvation as well as the part our parish family plays in God's wonderful story. Our grounds offer spaces to meditate, pray and commemorate saints and parishioners who went before us.



Great Shrine of the Little Flower, Centre Square

Father Higgins' deep devotion to St. Theresa stemmed from his visit to Europe in 1925. Word spread far and wide about Father Higgins, the eloquent pastor with the down to earth sermons, the weekly novena devotions and the beautiful pastoral setting at St. Helena in Center Square.

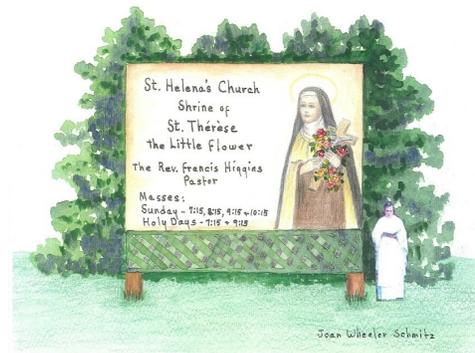


Each Sunday afternoon pilgrims came by the hundreds by car, train and trolley to that first little church known as the Shrine of the Little Flower. There was even a stop along the Route 202 trolley route known as "The Shrine." On October 5, 1930 a pageant entitled "Christ Living in His Brethren" was witnessed by 40,000 on the grounds. Parking was provided for 15,000 cars. The pageant observed the 33rd anniversary of the death of Saint Theresa and ended a nine week novena to the saint praying for prosperity in the difficult times.

The same day about 25 men and women participated in The Pageant of Saints. Each was dressed in an elaborate costume portraying the saint he or she represented and presented a performance based on the saint's life. According to the Norristown Times Herald on October 6, 1930, Joan of Arc, represented by Miss Alice O'Brien of Conshohocken led the Pageant of Saints.



For many years after the pageant, the Shrine remained a sacred place full of hope and promise. Thousands came to worship and pray for miracles whether by car or organized bus trips. In the first Church, the St. Theresa Shrine was prominently displayed in the front of the church, to the left of the Tabernacle. The faithful paid honor to Saint Theresa by fixing wall placards and window inserts that served as thanks for prayers answered.



... In This Hour Show Us Your Power



To the left is the original statue of St. Theresa from the original Shrine.

To the right, that same statue has been lovingly refurbished with colors believed to be more representative of the times.



In 1963, the original Shrine fell into disrepair and the building was razed. However, the original statue of Saint Theresa was relocated to the second Church in a small area in the back of the Church. The space was tight and often parishioners and visitors waited in line to pay homage to their devoted saint.



In keeping with this rich parish tradition Monsignor Nicolo named the new Chapel “The St. Theresa Chapel.” It was dedicated in 2004 and displays proudly the original statue from the earlier Shrine and is adorned with the magnificent ceiling mural of Jesus, Mary and our beloved Theresa, all lovely remembrances of a long and revered history with this beloved patroness.

At the center of the Chapel ceiling is a lovely fresco of its Patron, St. Theresa the Little Flower and the Blessed Mother seated with Baby Jesus in her lap. Surrounded by angels, Mary is shown tenderly handing on to Theresa a lovely spray of her trademark roses, reminding us of Theresa’s powerful intercession and inviting us to pray:

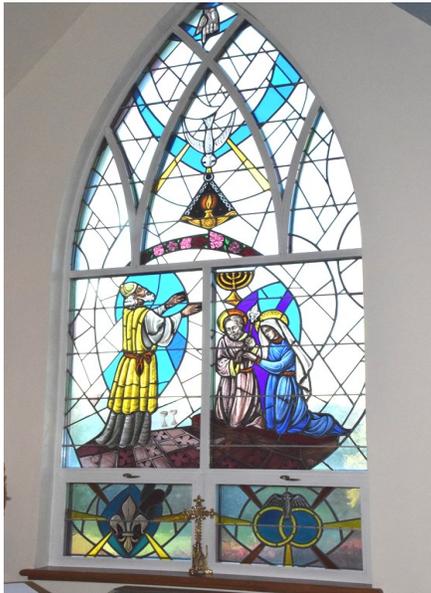
“Little Flower, in this hour, show us your power!”



Honoring the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph



Sacred images are used to tell the story of our salvation which is why statues and stained glass images of Mary and Joseph are given such prominence in Catholic Churches. In our parish Chapel we have honored that tradition as well as our rich parish history by preserving these statues from our former church and having them lovingly refurbished by one of our parishioners, Barbara Fitzpatrick.

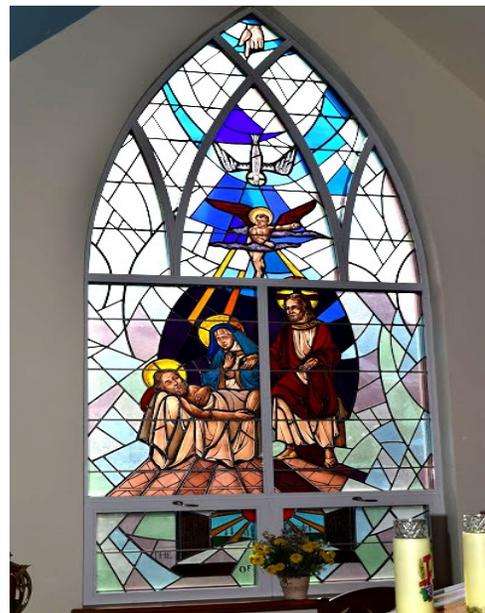


“The Marriage of Mary and Joseph” as Tradition tells us, features Mary and Joseph kneeling before the Jewish priest with the Menorah and ceremonial glasses behind them. Significant faith symbols, rich in history complete the story:

- Hand of God - Divine Providence
- Dove - The Holy Spirit
- Light - The Presence of God
- Fleur de Lis - Purity
- Rings -Symbol of Marriage

“The Happy Death” offers a lovely reflection on the death of St. Joseph who again, according to pious Catholic tradition, died “in the arms of Jesus and Mary.” Having been so graced at the hour of his death he has become for all the Patron of a Happy Death as well as the Patron of the Universal Church. Here again, traditional faith symbols round out the story:

- Hand of God - Divine Providence
- Dove - The Holy Spirit
- Angel
- Streams of Light - God’s Presence



COME PRAY WITH ME

Four additional stained glass windows encircle the Chapel with their iconic imagery paying homage to the saints whose stories they reflect. The sun, like God's divine light, brings life to their images sketched out in glass. As the saints fully alive glorified God, so too, do the windows that depict them. The Paraclete at the top of each window reminds us of God's divine inspiration.



To the far left is the window depicting St. John the Beloved. He is also known as St. John the Evangelist and author of the Gospel of John. He was the youngest apostle and brother of James.

St. James the Great, brother of John, was the first apostle to be martyred. He was also a witness to Christ's transfiguration.

St. Catherine of Siena, far right, was a Dominican sister and teacher of the authentic faith. She is one of only four women (including St. Theresa) to be named a Doctor of the Church because of her writings. She is the patron saint of journalists and media professionals.

St. Margaret of Antioch the "dragon slayer," was tortured and imprisoned for her faith and later had an encounter with the devil in the form of a dragon.



Below are four of the fourteen carvings of the Stations of the Cross. The carvings represent images of Jesus following the Way of the Cross and were repositioned from our former church. Their placement within and around the Chapel walls seems to draw us in and enfold each of us in its mystery while reminding us of Jesus' invitation that, "Those who wish to come after Me must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow Me."



The Chapel Murals: Jesus Teaches



In this painting we find Jesus, who at the age of twelve accompanied Mary, Joseph and other relatives to Jerusalem following the “custom of the feast” of Passover. Upon their return, Jesus lingered behind in the Temple, and completely comfortable in His Father’s house, began instructing the teachers. When Mary and Joseph found Him several days later He was teaching, keenly aware of His identity and mission and with a compelling wisdom beyond His years.

Jesus traveled from time to time in the region of Galilee and one day went up a mountainside and spoke to His disciples and the large crowd that had gathered. The sermon which included the Beatitudes, the Lord’s Prayer and many of His primary teachings, was offered as a vision of moral perfection for all of His disciples for all ages.



This beautiful painting, “Forgiveness” depicts a woman caught in adultery and brought to Jesus by the Scribes and Pharisees who were seeking to entrap Him. A silent, reflective, and merciful Jesus is shown writing on the ground, before proclaiming, “Let he who is without sin throw the first stone.” As the crowd meekly disburses, Jesus forgives the woman and with tenderness and compassion sends her forth with the message to “From now on avoid this sin!”

The Chapel Murals: the Miracles

Aside from the Resurrection this story depicts the only miracle recorded in all four Gospels. The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes is rich in mystery and symbolism in both the Old and New Testaments. It harkens back to the Old Testament stories of Elisha with the barley loaves and Moses with the manna in the desert, but more importantly it is a foretelling of what Jesus will do in the Upper Room on the night before He died and its implications for eternal life.



This mural reveals the start of Jesus' public life when, at the Marriage Feast of Cana, He performs His first miracle by turning water into wine. When Mary told Jesus they had run out of wine, He replied by telling her that His hour had not yet come, prompting Mary to advise the Steward to, "Do whatever He tells you." These last recorded words of Mary in all of Sacred Scripture were a prophetic message to all the world to obey Jesus in all things.



The Transfiguration is sometimes referred to as Jesus' miracle. This is the time when Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him to Mount Tabor to pray. While praying, He was transfigured before them in heavenly glory! Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, also appeared in radiant glory and as a cloud overshadowed them heard a voice saying, "This is my chosen Son: listen to Him."

The Transfiguration is considered to be a highly significant event in the whole history of our faith because it revealed the hidden divinity of Jesus before His passion and death.



This is Sacred Space

The sacred grounds of St. Helena Parish offer an invitation to all to come, to pause, and to find peace in the realization that the glory of God's earthly creation are but a foretaste of the heavenly glory which awaits us. Every facet of our sacred space is rich in meaning and mystery, theology, and history. Each addition and enhancement over time reveals some important detail of the story of salvation and God's infinite love for us.

We have been truly blessed from our inception with the tranquil beauty of rolling pastures and visionary shepherds whose ability to weave this natural beauty into their mission to come and "build My Church" has become our cornerstone for generations to come.

Father Higgins was intrigued by the sprawling landscape, especially a natural spring on the west side of the property which flowed into a larger pond in the woods. A visit to Lourdes shortly after he became pastor awakened in him a vision of flowing ponds and healing waters which became the inspiration for creating a grotto-like structure and several small ponds flowing into one another. A beautiful fieldstone grotto was fashioned with an altar for outdoor worship and a niche to house the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes.



The property also served as a natural backdrop for placement of inspirational statues. One tableau was "Jesus Meeting the Woman of Samaria at Jacob's Well." It shows Jesus welcoming the Samaritan Woman, an outcast, engaging in conversation and rejoicing in her conversion. The tableau, located behind the current main Church, offers a poignant reflection of Jesus' ministry to outcasts and invites us to our own call to conversion and to spread the Good News.

Father further enhanced our grounds with the addition of a terracotta statue of St. Joseph and the Christ Child, a shrine with Our Blessed Mother and images of the Sacred Heart and Saint Theresa.

On April 19, 1948 after 29 years at Saint Helena, Father Higgins passed away. In keeping with his wishes, his gravesite can be found across from the rectory "There where the sun and the moon cast reflections is where I will build the Church. There is also the spot where I want to be buried." At Father's gravesite the two altars from the second Church are also buried.



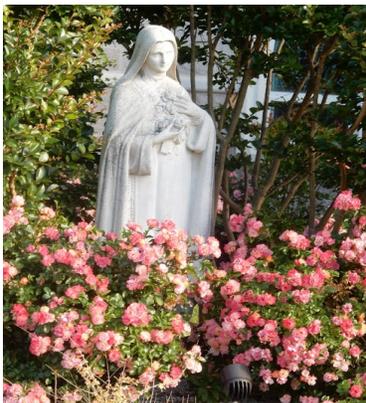
The Vision Continues ...

Beautification, Restoration, Enhancement

In 2000, St. Helena Parish entered into an era of great renewal with the appointment of our new Pastor, Father Joseph J. Nicolo, whose task was to take on the daunting mission of building our new Church.

In 2001, Father shared with us his vision for our emerging needs, to not only build a beautiful new Church but to expand our parish facilities as well. With his unique vision and understanding of Art and Worship and his tireless energy for beautifying our sacred space, Monsignor Nicolo has created a true haven of peace and beauty which truly connects us to a heavenly realm!

Since the completion of the building and dedication of our Social and Recreation Center, new Church and St. Theresa Chapel, work has continued steadily on the beautification, restoration and enhancement of parish buildings and has expanded to include our Garden Shrines and landscape.



In 2005, the statue of our beloved St. Theresa the Little Flower, was relocated from the Shrine to its welcoming presence at the Chapel in her honor. The original statue of St. Joseph was lovingly repositioned along the roadway between the Chapel and Church.

Another statue, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, now overlooks the Yost Road internal driveway.

In 2006, the Bavarian Wayside Shrine was added which became a portal of sorts to the Rosary garden and Stations of the Cross bordering the roadway.



Special Remembrances



Father Tadeusz Gorka, one of our former Parochial Vicars, has left his lasting imprint on our parish landscape with his exquisitely designed Memorial Koi Pond fronting the parish Rectory. A koi pond, by its very design, is a naturally balanced water garden where all the parts complement each other and play critical roles in the pond's natural harmony, and in the beauty, vibrancy and continuity of life.

This beautifully designed pond was created as a living memorial for three of our beautiful children who now live in the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father:

Erin Delia Moore
John Matthew Shapiro
Landon Sante Vargas

The pond itself is a perfect habitat for the colorful fish which are sometimes called "Living Jewels" and is contained with an impressive multi-tiered natural rock formation, creating a delightful cascade of falling water.

A lovely statue of an angel watching over a small child, a Personalized Memorial Plaque, and strategically placed garden benches welcome us in and invite us to revel in the wonders of God's creation and to find peace and comfort in the powerful connection between heaven and earth!

EAGLE SCOUTS RESPOND

Monsignor Nicolo's magnificent vision has seemed to ignite an interest in the Boy Scouts who have taken on this mantle and used these holy grounds as a perfect place to earn their rank as Eagle Scouts.

One of these Eagle Scout's amazing projects is the creation of the idyllic St. Francis of Assisi Garden Shrine gracing the entrance to the St. Theresa Chapel. The statue of St. Francis, whose boundless love of nature and animals has earned him the title of Patron of the Environment, sits atop an imposing stone pedestal surrounded by his beloved animals and the beauties of nature!



Between the Chapel and the Church is a replica of the Three Crosses on Calvary, another creation of one of the scouts. The Three Crosses represent Rebellion (Gestas), Repentance (Dismas) and Redemption (Jesus). In a real sense, looking at the Three Crosses can help us to reflect on our own personal crosses and whether we reject them like the bad thief, accept them like the good thief, or embrace them as Jesus did and unite them with Jesus's own suffering.

Another creation of one of our Eagle Scouts is the beautiful Rosary Garden near the Bavarian Wayside Shrine. The Holy Rosary is considered to be the a beautiful prayer because, through the Mysteries, it tells the story of our salvation. In each of her apparitions, Our Blessed Mother encouraged us to pray the rosary and promised that those who did would be shielded from evil and led to peace.

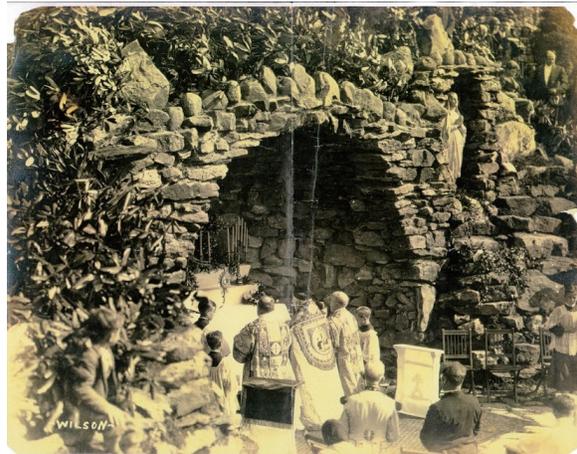
In our garden, stones forming the decades of beads take the shape of a rosary complete with cross and centerpiece. A pair of stone benches invites us in to pray!



The Grotto Of Our Lady of Lourdes

The Lourdes Grotto, with its long and storied history, is perhaps the most iconic of all of our outdoor Shrines. It began with the vision of Father Higgins who was inspired by a pilgrimage to Lourdes and wanted to create our own parish Shrine, in the tradition of Lourdes, which could be worthy of liturgical celebrations and processions honoring Our Lady.

Father's dream was realized and the original design, which took shape almost a hundred years ago, has been refurbished, restored and re-imagined through the years.

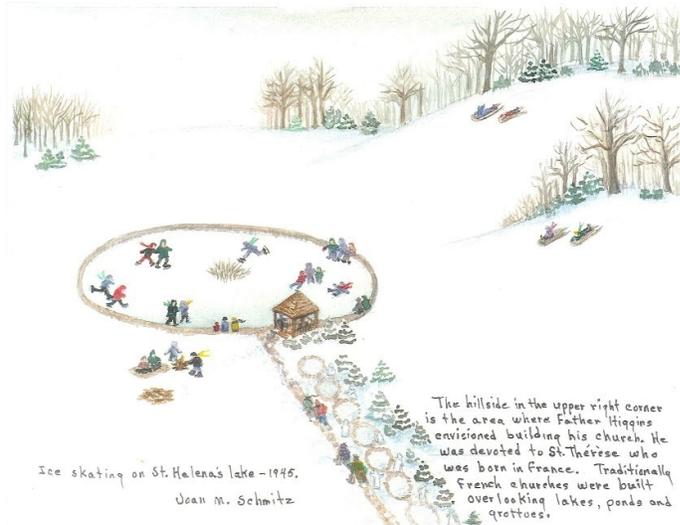


In anticipation of the hundredth anniversary of our founding, Monsignor Nicolo refocused on our Beautification, Restoration and Enrichment Campaign, placing great emphasis on the redesign and expansion of all of our gardens and outdoor Shrines. The Grotto has been magnificently re-imagined and expanded to include a handsome new pergola and awe-inspiring sanctuary for prayer and peace-filled reflection.

The vertical posts of the pergola are set in stately stone planters which are laced with woody vines and seasonal plantings. The beautiful stained glass and leaded glass windows from our original Church form a dramatic backdrop against the pergola's framework. The marble altar from our second Church now holds a place of prominence within the Grotto itself.

The masterfully designed Grotto in its breathtaking new setting is truly a magnificent monument to Our Lady of Lourdes and a powerful testament to the long honored history and timeless tradition of our beloved St. Helena Parish!

A Look To The Future



Ice skating on St. Helena's lake - 1945.
Joan M. Schmitz

The hillside in the upper right corner is the area where Father Higgins envisioned building his church. He was devoted to St. Therèse who was born in France. Traditionally French churches were built overlooking lakes, ponds and grottoes.

The original property included areas of marshy ground, natural springs, and small ponds. Father Higgins envisioned these areas as healing waters leading to the original Lourdes Grotto. One large pond became a popular place for winter ice skating as depicted in this drawing from parishioner, Joan Schmitz, in 1943.

Over time these ponds fell into disrepair. But now a new Eagle Scout project will revitalize the area leading to the New Grotto.

On the back cover:

Outdoor Stations of the Cross on the roadway across from the main Church.

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Shrine of Three Crosses - Jack Sanfilippo
Rosary Garden - Derrick Kuklinski

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