

Giving from the Heart

By now, most of you at St. Mary's are aware of the intriguing masonry work that has been going on at the front entrance to the church. Did you know that long-time parishioner, **Carol Braham**, is the creative force behind this beautiful new area? Carol has not only enriched our parish by enhancing the physical spaces around St. Mary's; she has also devoted herself to a number of ministries, activities, and outreach projects during the twenty years that she has been a church member:

"While our kids attended local public schools, we have always supported St. Mary's School as a very important ministry and extension of the church. As a former Catholic school teacher, I have great respect for the mission of parish schools as well as the vibrancy and life they bring to the congregation. Over the years I have been involved in a number of different ministries at St. Mary's: Small Christian Community Leader, Eucharistic Minister, Junior High Ministry, Just Faith, various Pastoral Ministry programs, and the Easter Season Baptismal Font design and set-up. One of the most impactful ministries for me was participating on the core team for the Partners in Mission in Ecuador Ministry which connects our parish with the Working Boys' Center in Quito, Ecuador. I, as well as my whole family, have been deeply touched through our involvement in this life-giving ministry."



Four years ago, Carol collaborated on the design of the circular gathering place that we have all enjoyed so much, at the heart of which is her tree mosaic which memorializes the giant oak that stood there for so long. Her latest project, at the entrance of the church, is a large cross set into brick, which features design elements inspired by the church: The Bluestone cross references the crosses at the peak of the church and bell tower. The mosaic centerpiece of the cross is a simple Mary icon surrounded by three symbols. The Mary symbol on the left is taken directly from the inscription at the base of the Mary statue next to the altar. The Mary symbol on the right is from the Miraculous Medal associated with the story of Mary and St. Catherine Labouré, as well as St. Maximilian Kolbe. And the third symbol, the Chi-Rho, to which the icon is anchored, signifies all things rooted in Christ. The Fleur-de-lis is incorporated into the mosaic as it is also a symbol for Mary and can be seen all along the sides of the bell tower.

Carol's interests, training, and work life prepared her well to take on this significant project:

"While I have taken a couple of college-level art classes and many seminars through the Society of American Mosaic Artists, I would have to say that I am highly self-taught through study and practice. I have spent many, many years around the trades as an owner/builder with my particular talents focused on masonry and tile work. I was then able to merge the love of those trades with my artistic desires through my company, Artistic Creations. Being able to express myself creatively brings me incredible satisfaction!"

When asked what motivates her to give in so many ways to our church, her enthusiasm for giving shines through in her response:

"How wonderful is it that a person can use their God-given gifts, talents, passions, etc. to give back to others? Obviously, my areas of interest are not a traditionally female pursuit, but I feel incredibly blessed to be able to embrace who God created me to be and to channel that in a positive direction. *It is true that in giving, we receive... it feels great!*"