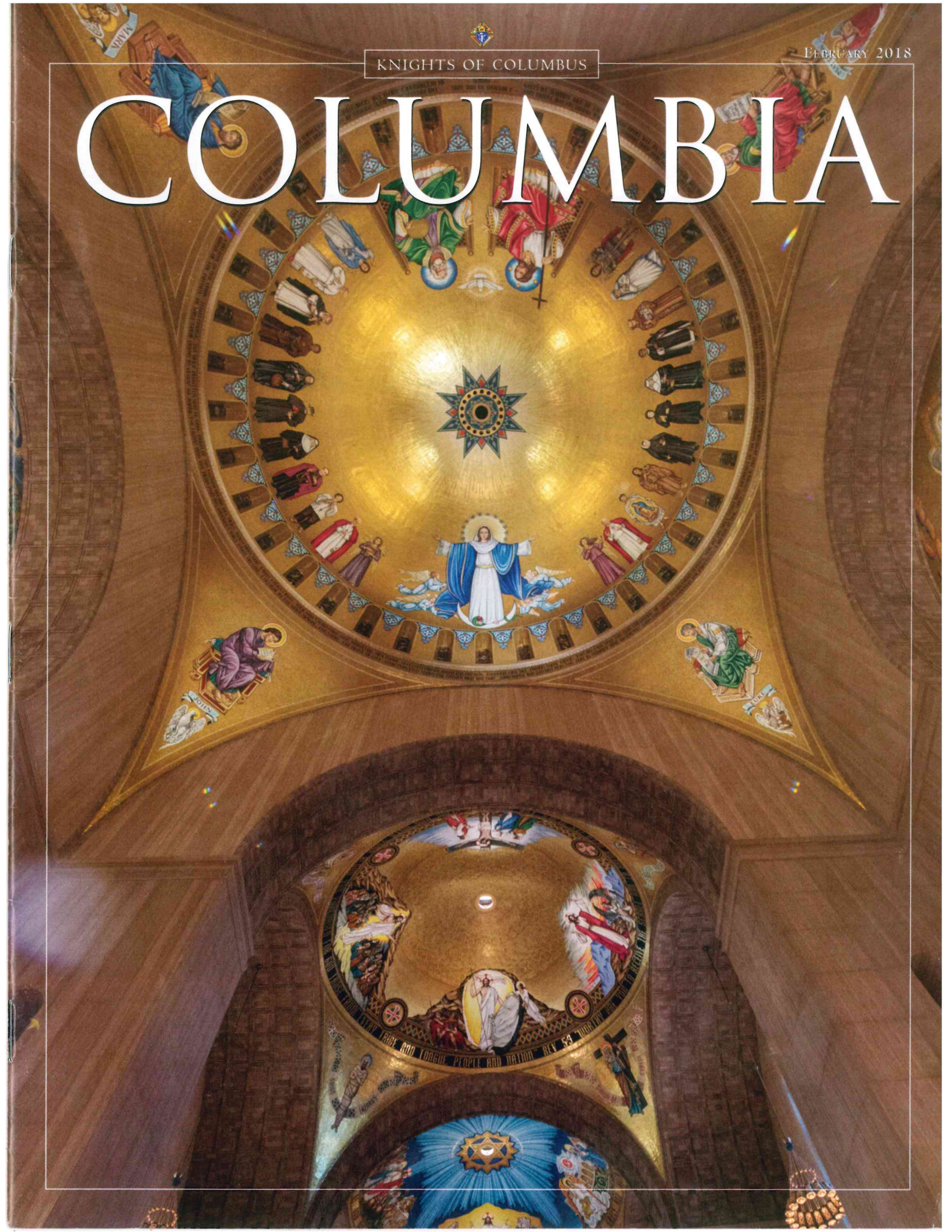




KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

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COLUMBIA



The Basilica's Crowning Jewel

*The Trinity Dome mosaic completes the
Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception*

by Kelly Sankowski

David Jonke was walking down the center aisle of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C., when his mentor, Brett Rugo, looked up at the Great Dome — not yet adorned with mosaic tiles — and said to him, “Kid, how are we going to get up there and do that someday?”

That was about 10 years ago. Rugo’s company had been working on projects at the shrine since 1997, starting with the Universal Call to Holiness, a large bas-relief located at the back of the Great Upper Church. Rugo and Jonke also worked on the Redemption Dome, the Knights of Columbus Incarnation Dome and cultural chapels in the basilica. But each of these projects was small in comparison to the installation of the Trinity Dome mosaic on the Great Dome’s interior — one of the largest mosaic installations of its kind in the world.

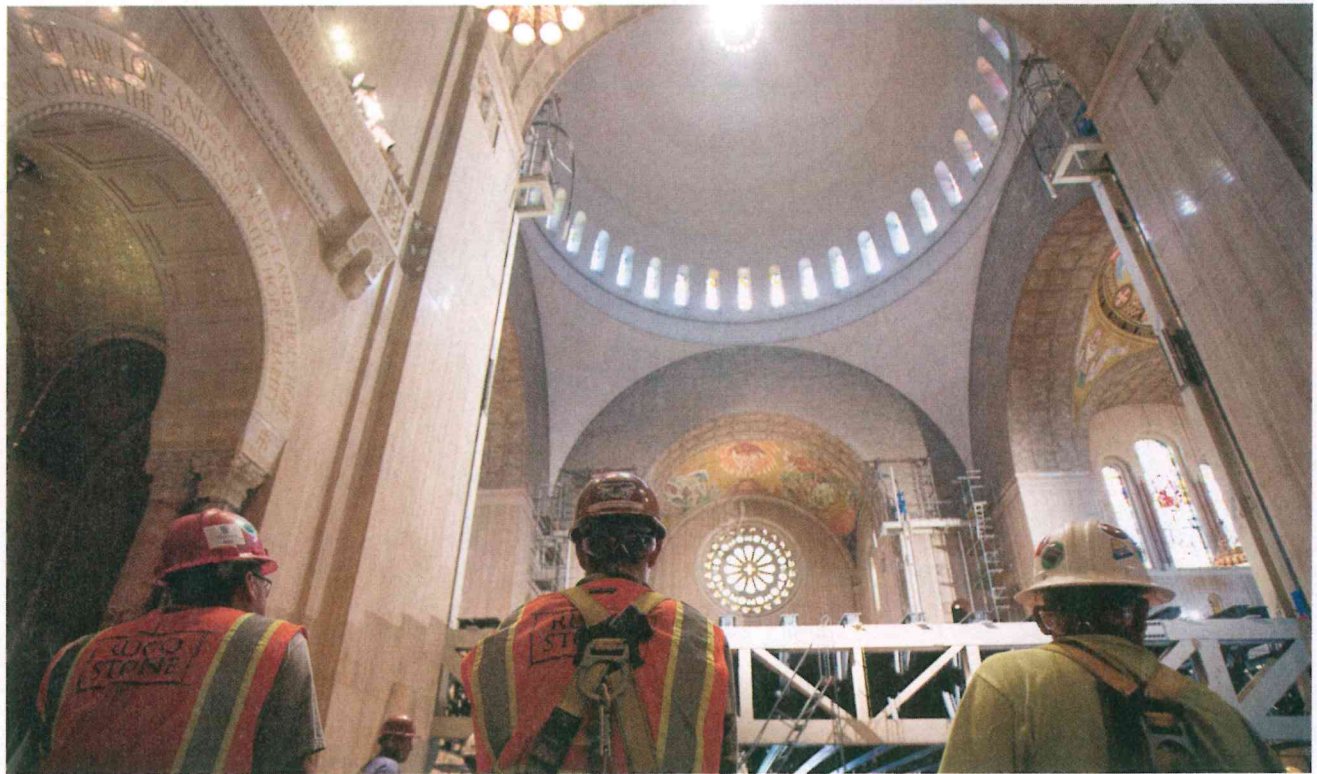
After two years of work, the team at Rugo Stone completed the project in 2017, and when they removed the 20,000 pieces of scaffolding, the Trinity Dome’s majestic mosaic was revealed.

Covering more than 26,000 square feet, including the curved vaulting surrounding the dome, the mosaic is made up of nearly 15 million pieces of Venetian glass, assembled by the Trivisanutto Giovanni mosaic studio in Spilimbergo, Italy. It depicts the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary as the Immaculate Conception, 17 saints, one blessed, the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, and two choir angels — encircled at the base with the text of the Nicene Creed and surrounded by the four evangelists.



The colorful exterior of its Great Dome and 329-foot Knights' Tower make the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception an easily recognizable landmark in Washington, D.C. • Opposite page: The recently dedicated Trinity Dome mosaic is pictured at the Basilica of the National Shrine.





Rugo Stone employees inspect the platform that would be used to support the workers more than 150 feet above the floor while installing the Trinity Dome mosaic, July 13, 2016.

The completion of the Trinity Dome mosaic, accomplished in part thanks to financial support from the Knights of Columbus, marked the fulfillment of the shrine's original architectural and iconographic plans, developed in the 1950s. The dome was officially dedicated Dec. 8, 2017, with Mass celebrated by Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl, archbishop of Washington.

At the conclusion of the Mass, Msgr. Walter Rossi, rector of the basilica, had a special word of thanks for the many benefactors and all who made the Trinity Dome possible.

"This crowning jewel of Mary's Shrine," he said, "is really your work — your gift to the Blessed Mother."

AN UNBELIEVABLE UNDERTAKING

Nearly 100 years ago, on Sept. 23, 1920, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore and other senior churchmen in the United States laid the cornerstone for what would become the largest church in North America. Since that day, the National Shrine has been a work in progress, with each of its seven domes gradually completed to display important theological scenes.

The last dome mosaic to be completed before the Trinity Dome was the Knights of Columbus Incarnation Dome, which was dedicated in November 2007. It was while working on that dome that Rugo became interested in the Knights.

"It really piqued my curiosity and I wanted to know a lot more about them," Rugo said. "All the good charitable things they do worldwide, the good things they do with local

parishes and on a national level — I wanted to be part of it."

Rugo is now a member of Edward Douglass White Council 2473 in Arlington, Va. As a member of the Knights, he is proud that the Order was one of the major benefactors of the Trinity Dome project.

The Trinity Dome is five times larger than the domes that Rugo and Jonke had worked on previously. Rugo called it "Mount Everest compared to little small hills."

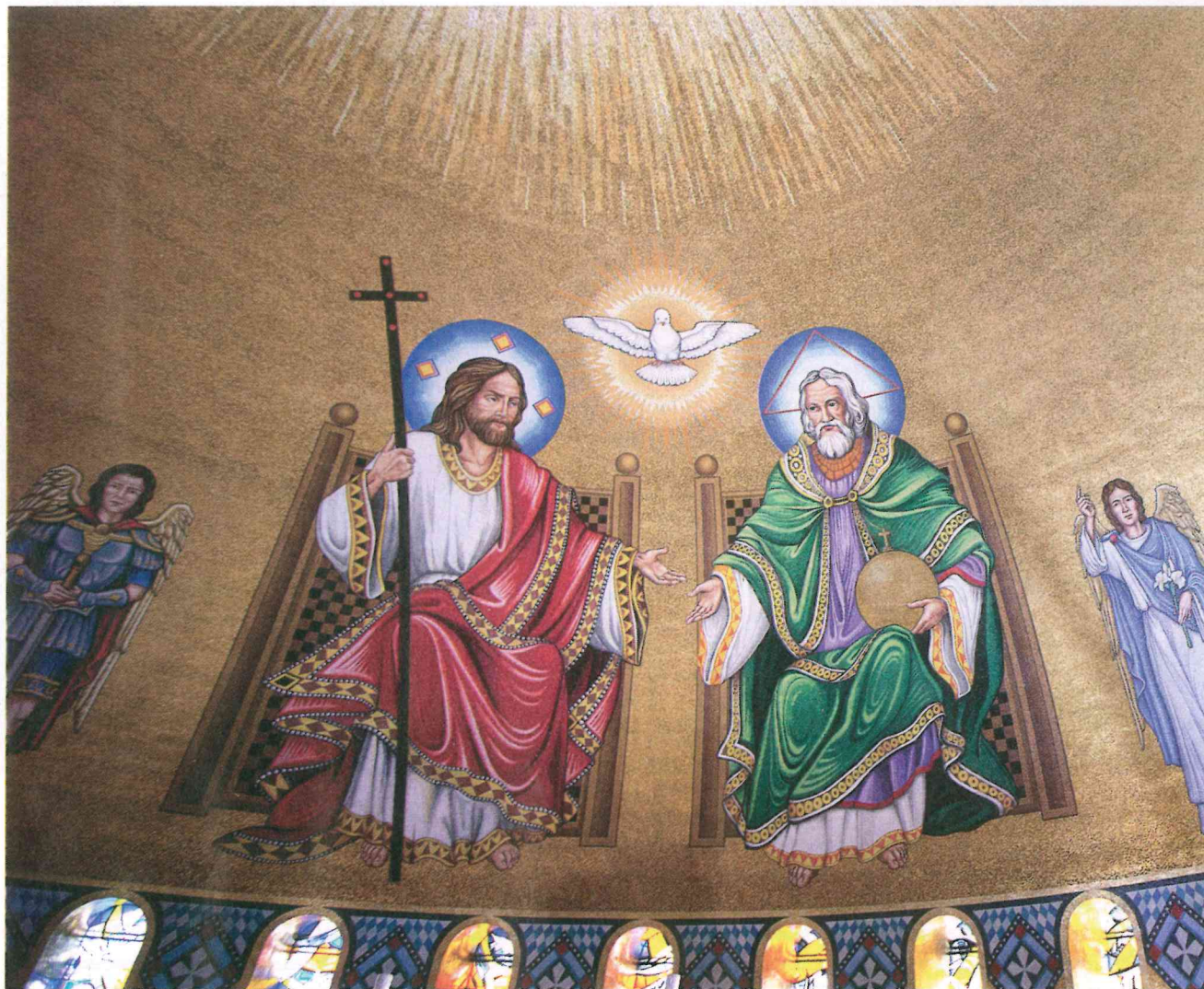
The scaffolding that supported the workers for the installation of the mosaic weighed about 300,000 pounds and had to be constructed inside the church, without the use of a crane. When it was completed, the scaffolding reached more than 150 feet above the floor of the basilica's nave, supporting a platform that was 16 stories high.

"There were a few people who said, 'No, you can never do it,'" recalled Jonke, who served as the project's general superintendent. "When you tell me, 'You can't do something,' that gives me the energy and confidence to pull it off."

Jonke and his team worked around the clock to ensure that everything was done safely, swiftly and without interruption to any of the special events held at the basilica.

"There was no room for mistakes," said Jonke. "Everything had to be right when it came out."

Rugo called the project an "unbelievable undertaking," noting that the original schedule had the project taking three and a half years, yet they did it in only two — and finished six weeks early, without any injuries or lost time.



Clockwise, from top: The Holy Trinity is seen in a detail of the newly dedicated Trinity Dome. The Son is seated at the right hand of the Father while the Holy Spirit hovers between them in the form of a dove. • Pope Francis blesses the first completed segment of the Trinity Dome mosaic, containing the first and last words of the Nicene Creed, prior to the canonization Mass of St. Junípero Serra at the National Shrine, Sept. 23, 2015. • Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson and his wife, Dorian, stand on scaffolding next to a completed section of the Trinity Dome mosaic during the construction process in June 2017.



TOP: CNS photo/Myer Orsburn — BOTTOM RIGHT: Photo by L'Osservatore Romano — BOTTOM LEFT: Photo by Stephen Feller



The newly completed mosaic includes a 31-foot-tall depiction of Mary as the Immaculate Conception and a procession of saints. A choir angel stands to the right of Our Lady, followed by St. John Paul II (the first pope to visit the National Shrine), St. Juan Diego (the first canonized male Native American), St. Kateri Tekakwitha (the first canonized female Native American), St. Rose Philippine Duchesne, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, St. Katharine Drexel, St. Martin de Porres, St. Junípero Serra (declared a saint by Pope Francis at the National Shrine in 2015 during the first canonization ever to take place on American soil), and St. Teresa of Calcutta (an honorary American citizen). Others portrayed on the dome are the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, St. John XXIII, St. Rose of Lima, St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini, St. Damien of Molokai, St. Marianne Cope, St. John Neumann, St. Lorenzo Ruiz, and Blessed Paul VI. • Opposite page: Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl (left), archbishop of Washington; Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life; and Msgr. Walter Rossi, rector of the basilica, stand with a letter from Pope Francis after the Dec. 8 Mass dedicating the Trinity Dome. Cardinal Farrell, formerly an auxiliary bishop in Washington and bishop of Dallas, served as the Holy Father's personal representative for the event.

THE KNIGHTS AND THE NATIONAL SHRINE

The Knights of Columbus has had a close relationship with the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception throughout the shrine's history. Here are some highlights.

- 1920** A Fourth Degree honor guard is present at the cornerstone-laying ceremony of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, presided by Cardinal James Gibbons Sept. 23.
- 1957** The Order's Board of Directors agrees to finance construction of the campanile, or bell tower, of the basilica.
- 1959** The 329-foot bell tower is dubbed the "Knights' Tower" at its dedication. Inside the entrance to the campanile is a bronze tablet noting the Order's gift "as a pledge of devotion of its members to our Blessed Lady, patroness of the United States."
- 1963** The Order finances the installation of a carillon of 56 bells in the Knights' Tower.
- 1977** Virgil C. Dechant, the 12th supreme knight, places his administration under Mary's intercession during a Mass at the National Shrine.
- 1979** The \$1 million Luke E. Hart Memorial Fund, named for the 10th supreme knight (1953-64), is established by the Knights' board to benefit the shrine.
- 1989** The carillon in the Knights' Tower is rededicated after the Order funded the bells' restoration as well as the installation of several new bells. In keeping with medieval tradition, names are given to the largest bells — among them Michael and Virgil, patron saints of the Order's founder and 12th supreme knight, respectively.
- 1991** The 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyages of discovery and evangelization is marked by the Order with a Mass at the National Shrine Oct. 14.
- 1998** The Our Lady of Africa Chapel, constructed with financial support from the Order, is dedicated. Later that year, a stained-glass window of Father Michael J. McGivney, located in the Crypt Church sacristy, is also dedicated.



“It has really been a hall of fame performance by the workmen in the field,” said Rugo. “We are very, very proud of the accomplishment.”

ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME OPPORTUNITY

The National Shrine is often affectionately referred to as “America’s Catholic Church,” because it was envisioned as a gift from the nation’s Catholics to display the country’s many cultures and their devotion to Mary. Throughout the shrine’s history, the generosity of American Catholics has made the pilgrimage site possible. One of those people was Jonke’s grandfather.

Every time Jonke begins a new project at the shrine, his mom reminds him about his grandfather, Josiah Sanders, who

was a member of South Akron Council 3410 in Ohio while the Order was raising funds to build the basilica’s bell tower.

Sanders became very interested in the development of the shrine, and on every visit to his son in Maryland he would bring his family to view the construction in progress. After the Knights’ Tower was dedicated in 1959, Sanders longed to see the rest of the shrine completed. Little did he know that his grandson would play a large role in making that happen.

In addition to being grateful that he got to see his grandfather’s dream come true, Jonke feels privileged to complete the work of so many others.

“There’s been stonemasons working here since the groundbreaking,” said Jonke. “It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to finish a 100-year-old building.”

The project proceeded “like clockwork” — a testament to the skill of the workers, Jonke said. But he knew that grace was necessary as well.

“No matter how much you plan for something, anything can go wrong,” he said.

For both Rugo and Jonke, their Catholic faith has made their projects at the shrine more meaningful. Being surrounded by so much sacred art and learning about its significance day after day has been “like a second catechism,” Rugo said.

Rugo expressed gratitude to Msgr. Rossi and to Cardinal Wuerl for trusting Rugo Stone to work on the project, and said he was grateful to God that they were able to deliver it on time.

“I am happy it’s done for the basilica, but I am sad it is over, because it was an incredible process to be a part of,” he said. “It’s special to us, knowing we have had a big hand in the last 20 years of embellishing the largest church in North America.” ♦

KELLY SANKOWSKI is a reporter for the *Catholic Standard*, the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Washington, D.C.

2000 More than 12,000 Knights and family members attend the Knights of Columbus Jubilee Year Pilgrimage April 1. The event includes praying the rosary with Pope John Paul II via live satellite from Rome.

2002 The shrine hosts the first Knights of Columbus Eucharistic Congress. The Order also marks the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks with a Mass and patriotic program in the basilica.

2004 The National Shrine and the Knights co-sponsor an essay contest to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception.

2007 The Knights of Columbus Incarnation Dome, above the south nave of the basilica’s Great Upper Church, is completed with the Order’s support. Comprised of 2.4 million glass tiles over 3,780 square feet, the mosaic dome

portrays the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Wedding Feast at Cana and the Transfiguration.

2008 The basilica’s choir, led by Dr. Peter Latona, begins providing sacred music at the liturgies of the annual Supreme Convention.

2010 In cooperation with the Archdiocese of Washington and the Diocese of Arlington, the Supreme Council begins funding the weekly broadcast of Sunday Masses from the basilica for people confined to their homes.

2012 Knights participate in a Mass and Pilgrimage for Life and Liberty, led by Supreme Chaplain William E. Lori, to pray for the protection of human life and religious freedom.

2013 Thousands of Knights gather at the basilica Sept. 8 for a special Year of Faith Pilgrimage, during which the Order is reconsecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The event also celebrates

the 50th anniversary of the Knights’ Tower carillon. Three months later, Supreme Knight Carl A. Anderson receives the Patronal Medal from the National Shrine and The Catholic University of America for advancing Marian devotion.

2015 The Supreme Council provides funding and educational resources for the Mass of canonization of St. Junipero Serra, celebrated by Pope Francis at the National Shrine Sept. 23.

2016 The Order underwrites the television broadcasts of a “24 Hours for the Lord” devotion celebrated at the basilica for the Year of Mercy. The devotion is repeated in 2017 at the request of Pope Francis and again televised by the Knights.

2017 The Trinity Dome mosaic, the final stage of the architectural and iconographic plan for the basilica, is completed, thanks in part to the Order’s financial support of more than \$1 million.