

THE OUTREACH

St. Basil Catholic Church

South Haven, Michigan

‘Jesus Loves the Little Children’

By **Sylvia Verdonk**

That song was a favorite of mine as a young child growing up in my Sunday School classes. I loved singing songs and listening to the stories of the Bible. I first learned about God’s love through the love of my parents, but my church family showed me that God’s love was all around me—in His creation, everywhere I went, and in everyone who was a part of my ever-expanding world.

Fast-forward some fifty years. I started teaching a religious education class at St. Basil a decade ago. Four years ago, I was asked to be director of the Sunday morning religious education classes, including sacramental preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. I have been delighted to share my faith and the Bible with the youth of our parish. It is through scripture and the stories contained within that we realize God’s love for us, the sacrifice made by Jesus for us, and the guardian and guide we have to walk with us throughout our lives in the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said, “Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matthew 19:14) Children are born to love, and they thrive in love. The love of God is so easy for young children to understand and share. There is such delight in

their eyes when they hear the wonderful stories of the Bible and the parables of Jesus for the first, second, third, or even the *tenth* time, and I relish the smiles and hugs I have received from our youngest students when they attend classes each week and when we happen to meet in the grocery store!



A Reflection on Directing Youth Religious Education

While our younger students are little “sponges,” middle school and high-school students adopt a skepticism brought on by experiences in the secular world. Their relationship with Jesus as friend and guide is often what helps these students through the turbulent adolescent years. Working with older children and their catechists, I find that Bible stories, scripture, and prayer can keep the older children grounded. With the help of loving parents and an involved church

community, God’s love and guidance can help a child navigate the “growing pains.” Over the years, I have heard wonderful stories from catechists of problems that students have expressed on Sunday mornings and solutions explored through discussions among classmates, scripture readings, and intercessory prayers asking for guidance. The closing comment was often, “The kids were so good in their help and discussions. Everything was so calm and peaceful.”

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A Stadium for Souls

How a Summer Parishioner Designed Famous Ballparks – and Our Church

The architects a few years ago got quite the surprise.

They had just been hired to “Restore the Glory” of St. Basil Catholic Church. And when they checked the original 1922 blueprints, they discovered the name of a renowned architect: Zachary Taylor Davis, a Chicagoan who created iconic baseball stadiums, including Comiskey Park and Wrigley Field.

This summer marks two years since we moved back into our beautiful, restored church. Saddened by chipping paint, darkened windows and other disrepair, parishioners raised over \$1 million to rehab, spruce up, and brighten the house of worship.

And what we restored was the original vision of a 52-year old summer parishioner here in South Haven, Zachary T. Davis.

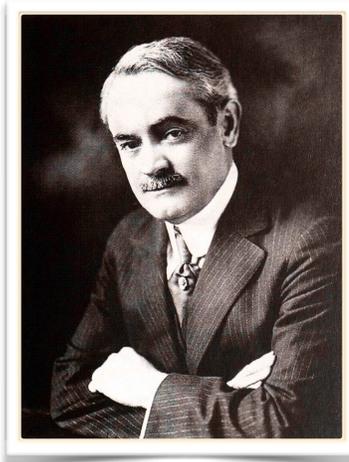
In November of 1921, St. Basil Catholic Church mysteriously burned to the ground. Immediately,

Davis volunteered to draw up a new church. He had already designed the two big ballparks in Chicago. But he seemed to pour particular passion into his summertime church in South Haven.

“The family always summered in South Haven,” says Todd Protzman Davis, Zachary’s great grandson. “And in Chicago they attended St. Ambrose, which Zachary also designed.”

From his offices in the cathedral-like Wrigley Building in Chicago, Zachary Davis dreamed up a symmetrical brick church with a soaring spire, slate roof and copper-clad cross. In the basement, plans showed a boiler room and a coal room to weather the winters. The new church would cost \$47,000.

That winter, Masses were moved to a small house, which was converted to a chapel, with a makeshift altar and folding chairs. Come summer, the enlarged congregation moved to the basement of what would become the Elks Lodge.



Zachary Taylor Davis

Courtesy / Todd Davis



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The original blueprints, March of 1922. Zachary Davis’s office was in the famous Wrigley Building in Chicago.

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Construction was completed, and the St. Basil we know today was dedicated in 1923.

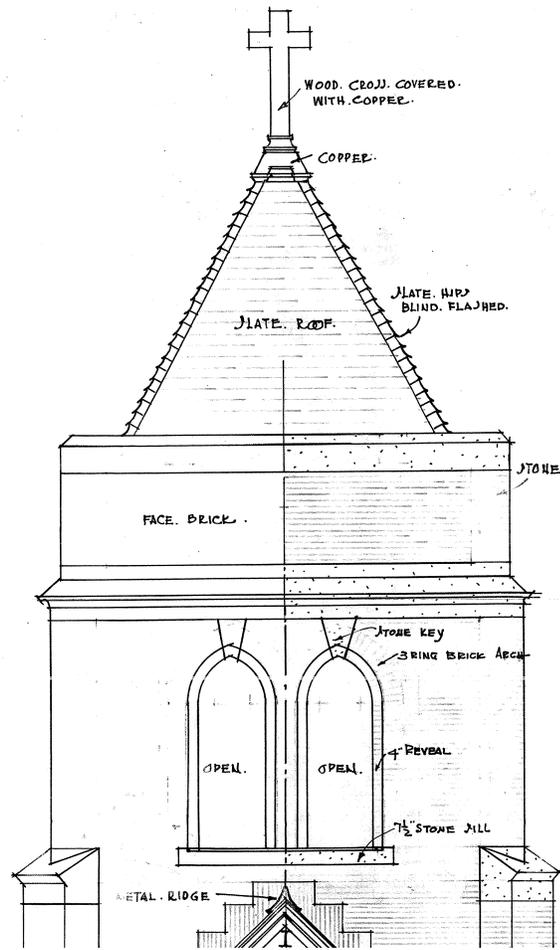
Zachary's son David H. Davis and his wife, Jane, enjoyed South Haven so much they eventually moved here. "I have very fond memories of visiting," Todd Davis says.

After 42 years of marriage, Zachary and his wife, Alma, died within weeks of each other, in 1946. Their funeral services were held at St. Ambrose, which arose from Zachary's pencil.

So, we have a gifted summer parishioner to thank for helping keep St. Basil alive.

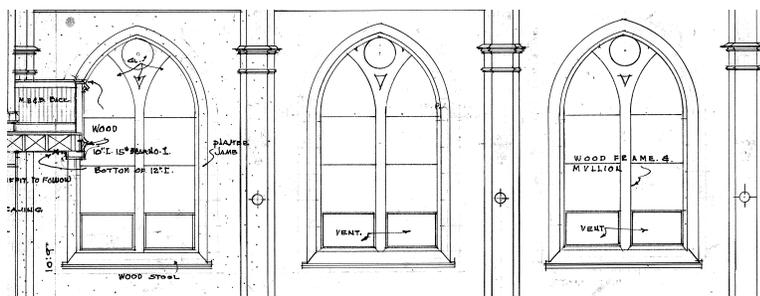
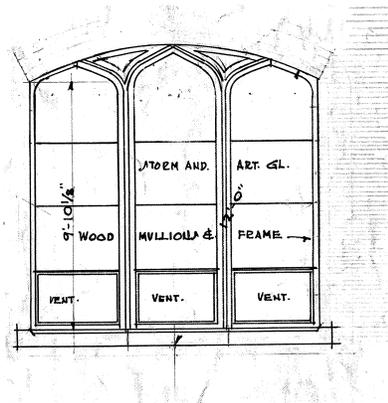


For more information, visit zacharytaylor.com



Davis's sketch of the windows over the altar, right, comes to life in the adjacent scene of the rededication Mass in July 2016.

Details of the steeple, above, and the side windows, below.



A Call to Love and Nurture Children



*By nature,
men desire
the beautiful.*

— St. Basil

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I have learned that this is God at work. It is sometimes a difficult lesson, but if we listen to Him, whatever the outcome, we will be at peace.

It is now time for me to pass on the opportunity to be Youth Religious Education Director to someone else. I have enjoyed my tenure too much not to be involved in some fashion, so I will not be totally absent from youth faith formation. The children of St. Basil parish are energizing for me and a precious part of God's family here in South Haven. They

add so much joy and thanksgiving to my life, but I hope to spend more time traveling and visiting our own children, which has been difficult to do when weekends are spent at Church. I urge the St. Basil Church family to love and nurture the children of the parish always. Parents: Never hesitate to share your own stories of faith with them. Help them know that they were created by God in love, they are His precious gifts to us, and He delights in them whenever they come to him in love and friendship. I pray that God will always bless our children, our future!



We welcome story ideas and new writers for *The Outreach*, published every two months. Mike McCarthy theoutreacheditor@gmail.com, Cathy Kimbler ckimbler@bangorvikings.org, Geralyn Monacelli geralynmonacelli@yahoo.com, Sylvia Verdonk sverdonk4@yahoo.com

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St. Basil Catholic Church
513 Monroe Boulevard
South Haven, MI 49090