

Vigil to keep St. Stan's open now a year old | Tom Shea - MassLive.com - - Tom Shea - MassLive.com

Wednesday, December 17, 2008
12:30 PM

Vigil to keep St. Stan's open now a year old

By [Tom Shea](#)

December 13, 2009, 5:00AM

Laurie Haas has enough to do.

A motor vehicle accident 13 years ago left her with a broken neck and crushed thoracic vertebrae. The resulting grinding pain rarely takes a day off.

On this recent morning, the 50-year-old mother of four has an appointment with her physical therapist and chiropractor.

It's also her 19th wedding anniversary, and she is hoping to go to dinner with her husband, Norman, known to most as "Dusty."

God works in mysterious ways, the worst and best, in one Roman calendar day.

Laurie is in too much pain to talk to me, but she can answer questions by e-mail. She doesn't miss an opportunity to promote the plight of St. Stanislaus Kostka Church in Adams.

For almost a year, Laurie has been the spokesperson for the "Friends of St. Stan's." Despite solid financial footing, a vibrant congregation, its beautiful old world design and décor, the church built by Polish immigrants in 1905 was closed last year by the bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Springfield as part of the diocese's ongoing consolidation effort.

Parishioners have appealed the decision, hiring a canon lawyer to represent them at the Vatican.

"We really have a strong case," Laurie says.

Two days after Christmas in 2008, Friends of St. Stan's commenced a vigil to last 24 hours a day, seven days a week, until the Vatican hears their appeal or they are physically removed by the diocese.

Seventy vigilers first volunteered, promising at least an hour a week.

By summer it was 150 vigilers.

With a dozen days left before Christmas, there are now 191.

Some, even those old enough to collect Social Security, spend the night, in sleeping bags, wrapped in wool blankets, finding shut-eye on the hard wood of church pews, within yards of where they made their first communion or were married, under the watchful eye of statues of saints to whom they've prayed all their lives.

The church temperature is set at 55.

"A typical vigil hour consists of talking, private and community prayer, reading and meditation," Laurie writes. "We've also kept alive our spirit of Christian benevolence and continue with typical faith community acts of charity. Our first project consisted of using our vigil hours to knit and crochet baby blankets and layette sets for premature babies at Springfield's Baystate Medical Center. Then we collected over a million aluminum can tabs (700 pounds) toward Shriners Children Hospital fundraising efforts. We are making blankets for the indigent in the Appalachia coal region and collected items for our brave military troops overseas and are sending clothing and supplies to Polish orphanages."

In the summer, St. Stan's took out an ad in The Republican, offering to help write an appeal to Rome on behalf of other diocesan churches slated for closing.

Laurie, a Divine Mercy devotee who finds comfort in the diary of St. Faustina Kowalska, wants to make it clear she is far from alone in these projects. She offers me the names and phone numbers of other parishioners faithful to the cause, including: Fran Hajdas, Terri Winarski, Dick Wisnowski, Pat Brassard, Robin Loughman and Dola Lipinski.

Hajdas, 72, a retired Navy electronics specialist, told Time magazine in a story earlier this year: "Makes me feel good to know that should I go to jail for this, I did the right thing."

I talk to Eugene Michalenko, 54, owner of a print shop in town. He was named for a priest at St. Stan's, the Rev. Eugene Ozimek. Eugene was an altar boy, volunteering for the 6:30 a.m. Sunday Mass. As an adult, he sang in the choir. When not caring for his elderly mother, he volunteers to sit in the church on Wednesday nights.

Eugene says he is optimistic about St. Stan's future.

"People are more hopeful than they were last year," Eugene says. "Last year was bad. We were depressed, angry. No way to celebrate Christmas. But people here are committed, not unlike those in 20th century Poland who did not give up under the rule of the Communists."

"While the mood of St. Stan's is upbeat and positive," Laurie says, "this is coupled with sadness that we can't have Mass celebrated this Advent season, especially at Christmas."

Instead, vigilers are planning to have a special Friends of Stan's get-together on Dec. 27. They'll sing Christmas carols, read scripture, pray, share a meal in the church hall below, and look forward to what they hope will be a happy new year.

Tom Shea is a columnist for The Republican. He can be reached at tommyshea55@yahoo.com.

Y

Inserted from <http://www.masslive.com/tomshea/index.ssf/2009/12/vigil_to_keep_st_stans_open_no.html>