

Leaving a Legacy

Ensuring The Basilica's future

MAE DESAIRE

When you walk through the doors of The Basilica of Saint Mary, you can feel the weight of history — the intricate stonework, the light pouring through stained glass, the echoes of prayer and song that have filled the space for more than a century. But The Basilica is more than a historic building; it is a living community of faith, service, and beauty.

For generations, parishioners have cared not only for one another, but also for the church itself. Today, that legacy continues through the generosity of The Basilica Landmark's Legacy Society — parishioners and friends who have made the extraordinary decision to include The Basilica in their estate plans. Their gifts ensure that this sacred place will endure, welcoming future generations just as it has welcomed them.

Legacy Society members — Laura Schommer, Daniel and Payton Waddell, and Dan and Carol Frenning — shared their stories, revealing why The Basilica holds such a special place in their lives and why they feel called to protect its future.

Finding Purpose in Service: Laura Schommer

For Laura Schommer, The Basilica has always been more than a parish. It is a community where friendships have blossomed and where she has lived out her call to serve.

Growing up in Osseo, Laura admired The Basilica from afar. "I always thought it was so beautiful," she recalled. In the late 1980s, she began attending Sunday Mass, drawn in by the homilies of Michael O'Connell. By 1994, she officially became a parishioner, eager to deepen her involvement.

"I didn't know anyone when I joined, so I looked for a way to become part of the community," she said. Teaching full-time meant weekday commitments were difficult, but she found her place in The Basilica's Saturday Shoe Ministry, a program that provided shoes to those in need. That ministry became her calling for decades, later joined by work in the Outreach Ministry until the pandemic.

Laura eventually joined the Legacy Society, a natural step for someone whose life had been shaped by The Basilica. "I have been blessed by God, and I feel a deep obligation to share my resources in gratitude," she explained. For her, the gift is about more than finances — it is about preserving a community that has given her so much.

"I remain humbled and honored to be part of The Basilica of Saint Mary," she said. "It is my hope to preserve and strengthen it so that future generations may experience its beauty, faith, and mission."



Laura Schommer

A Young Family's Commitment: Daniel and Payton Waddell

For Daniel Waddell, The Basilica has been both a spiritual home and the setting for some of life's most profound moments — including the baptism of his first child, Ollie, in early 2025.

Daniel first encountered The Basilica during college, when he realized how much he missed the rhythm and richness of Catholic Mass. Though his family was not Catholic, he had attended Catholic school in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. After drifting away from religious practice early in college, he felt a pull to return.

By his senior year at the University of

Minnesota, he sought out RCIA (now OCIA), the process for adults entering the Catholic Church. The Basilica happened to be the closest parish to his Uptown apartment offering the program. "I quickly discovered what a remarkable parish and community it is," he said. Even after moving to Saint Paul, he kept returning for the beauty of its liturgies, especially during Holy Week.

In 2024, shortly after his son's birth, Daniel joined the Legacy Society. Becoming a parent spurred him and his wife, Payton, to prepare a will. "At the same time, The Basilica provided access to free estate

planning software, which made the process easier," he said. "Gratefully, we had the means, and I wanted to give back to the parish that has given so much to me."

For Daniel, preserving The Basilica is not just about faith — it's about safeguarding a cultural treasure. "In a country as young as ours, it's rare to find places of such beauty and historical significance that remain alive with a vibrant community," he said. "The Basilica is both a sacred space and a cultural treasure, and we must do everything possible to protect and preserve it for future generations."



Ollie Waddell's baptism at The Basilica, February 2025.
Pictured: Payton and Daniel Waddell with Ollie, joined by the godparents at center.

Continued

A Lifetime of Devotion: Dan and Carol Frenning

If Laura Schommer and Daniel Waddell represent two generations of Basilica parishioners, Dan and Carol Frenning embody the enduring heart of the community. They joined in 1975, shortly after moving to the Lowry Hill neighborhood in Minneapolis.

“This year marks our 50th anniversary as parish members,” Carol said proudly.



Dan and Carol Frenning

Back then, the parish was small — just 200 families — and The Basilica School had recently closed. “We’ve seen the parish change and grow through the 1990s and continue to evolve today,” she reflected.

Their connection runs deep. Dan had known Monsignor Berntson, the pastor at the time, and the couple wanted a parish close to home. Over the decades, they watched as The Basilica weathered challenges, including the significant water damage that threatened the church in the 1980s.

Carol, an architectural historian, played a pivotal role in responding to that crisis. In 1991, she helped found the Friends of The Basilica of Saint Mary Foundation, now known as The Basilica Landmark.

That effort, she noted, “truly saved The Basilica,” rallying support beyond the parish to preserve the building. Carol will continue to serve The Basilica on the liturgical design committee for the coming interior restoration.

As founding members of the Legacy Society, the Frennings see their estate gift as a natural continuation of their lifelong commitment. “We want to see The Basilica restored to its original splendor and to ensure its future for generations to come,” Dan explained. For them, leaving a legacy is about honoring those who came before. “We often think about the original parish members and workers who built this beautiful church — their inspiration continues to guide us, and we feel called to carry that legacy forward.” ✚

Mae Desaire is the Communications Director at The Basilica.

Susan Link, Planned Giving Chair

Susan Link is an estate planning attorney, parish trustee, and the chair of the Planned Giving Committee for The Basilica Landmark. She serves as Program Co-Director for Wills for Heroes, an organization that provides first responders with basic estate planning at no charge.

For Susan, the value of planned giving is clear. “Estate planning ensures that personal wishes are carried out after death,” she explained. Without a will, Minnesotans are subject to the state’s default estate plan, which dictates how assets are distributed.

The process, she emphasized, doesn’t need to be overwhelming. “The first step is to contact The Basilica’s planned giving staff to learn more about available options,” she said. While consulting a qualified tax professional is recommended, a change to an existing will isn’t always required. A beneficiary designation, for example, can be set up directly through a brokerage or insurance firm.

Most importantly, planned gifts strengthen the foundation of The Basilica for the future. “A legacy gift helps ensure that The Basilica of



Saint Mary will remain a vibrant place of worship and community for future generations,” Susan noted. “These gifts provide resources for the preservation and restoration of the church, securing its strength and beauty well into the future.”



Easter Vigil, 2025

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— Daniel Waddell

New Online Tools for Planned Giving

Whether you are considering a will or trust, are designating beneficiaries of your life insurance policy, your retirement plan, or your bank or investment accounts, or are just deciding how you will be giving to The Basilica this year, we have some exciting new tools for you.

The Basilica Landmark has partnered with Crescendo to provide

resources on gift options that may offer tax and income benefits. The website now features a free estate planning guide as well as a will planning tool to assist in identifying the most appropriate gift plan to meet individual goals.

This site is informational and educational in nature. It does not provide professional tax, legal, or

accounting advice. For guidance regarding the effect of any planning concept on personal tax, financial, or estate matters, please consult a qualified professional advisor.

Visit thebasicalandmark.org and select “Planned Giving” to review new guides, videos, and additional resources.

To learn more about making a planned gift to The Basilica Landmark, contact Susan McGuigan, Development and Planned Giving Officer at: smcguigan@mary.org or 612.317.3421