

# Rome Sentinel

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The Sculpture - The replica of The Pieta that now sits in St. John the Baptist Church in Rome. It was delivered Sunday.

## Statue, gifted to St. John's, unveiled in dedication ceremony

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**STEVE JONES**



HELPING HANDS 0 The donors of the replica sculpture stand beside it at S. John the Baptist Church in Rome Sunday. From left: Richard Stewart, the Rev. Paul Angelicchio, Esther Stewart and Frank Schiro of Binghamton. Richard Stewart grew up in Rome and attend the church where his parents were married, so he insisted one of over 100 of the replicas be put here.



ADMIRATION - Esther and Richard Stewart admire the replica of The Pietà at St. John the Baptist Church, 200 E. Dominick St. Sunday. Fellow donor Frank Schiro is the Right

The replica of The Pietà, a sculpture by Michelangelo that sits in The Basilica of St. Peter in Vatican City, Rome, Italy, was unveiled and dedicated at St. John The Baptist Church on East Dominick Street Sunday.

A group called Arte Divine is making 112 of these from a mold of the original. Richard G. Stewart Jr., a Rome, New York, native now living in California, is funding 11 of them, including the one he wanted for his home town.

Stewart said he wanted to donate this sculpture on behalf of his father and mother, Richard and Josephine Gatto Stewart, who were married at the church in 1944.

The dedication marks the month 60 years ago when Stewart first served as an altar boy in the church.

The replica offers people a chance to see it without the trip across the Atlantic Ocean. The original sits behind bullet-proof glass in Italy, crafted in 1498 and 1499. It depicts the body of Jesus on the lap of his mother Mary after the Crucifixion.

“Sixty-two years ago, I was proud to be a part of The Knights of The Blessed Sacrament here at St. John the Baptist Church in Rome, New York,” said Stewart Sunday during the dedication. “I remember going to confession with Father Libra, in the very room that the Michelangelo pieta is now standing.” The first mass he served as an altar boy for was his great grandmother’s funeral, he noted.

“Two miracles happened to me within the walls of this church,” said Stewart.

“The first miracle was that the priest of the mass showed me a great amount of love and worked with me in a special way. As a result of that love, I was honored when I held in my hand a piece of the cross that Jesus was crucified on. When I asked Mother Superior, ‘How do you know this is a piece of the actual cross where Jesus was crucified?’ She told me that all who held a piece of this cross had miracles happen in their lives. I stand here today as testament that my life has been full of miracles.”

The second miracle, he said, occurred when there was a fire in the old St. John’s Church, “and in the aftermath Father Libra told me that there were only two statues that had survived without damage. He gave me one of the two statues — The Sacred Heart of Jesus Christ — a gift from St. John’s that still sits on my nightstand after 60 years.”

When Stewart had the opportunity to fund the creation of the pieta, his one condition was to place 100 of them around the world in locations of his choice as blessings to humanity.

“This community was a natural choice in my mind...from Rome, Italy, to Rome, New York. So today, I gift back St. John the Baptist Church, the clergy, and the community of Rome, New York where it all began in my life, Michelangelo’s greatest piece — this beautiful statue,” He said.

“I do this because of what was given to me here as a child, for all the kindness and love the clergy of this parish gave me. In loving memory of my father, Richard George, and my mother, Josephine Gatto, my wife and I now dedicate the Michelangelo pieta to the parishioners of this church. God Bless you all.”

Stewart is chief executive officer of Help Worldwide, a company that owns nine “loyalty” companies, those who offer members discounts and savings based membership. A portion of the money each consumer spends is given back to charities, he explained.