



# Mater Ecclesiae

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH



TRADITIONAL ROMAN RITE  
Established October 13, 2000

February, 2008  
Volume III, Issue I



## Deepening the Faith at The Padre Pio Gift Shop

Mater Ecclesiae's Padre Pio Gift Shop "serves a great purpose," says Father Pasley. Dedicated to Saint Pio before his canonization, the shop is operated by devoted parishioners.



*Sam and Kathi DiStefano*

"Sam DiStefano single-handedly opened the gift shop," said Father Pasley recently. Mr. DiStefano and his wife, Kathi, have given a great deal of their time to the shop, which was originally stocked by generous parishioners.

"I asked myself," Mr. DiStefano explains, "where is there a good Catholic gift shop? There were none in this area."

The Oblates of Saint Jude, a group of parish founders, took over the shop from Opus Mariae, the apostolate that preceded Mater Ecclesiae, and

since then the operation has grown and flourished.

Having gone through many stages of enlargement and enhancement, the shop today is large, airy, and packed with merchandise – books, religious articles, an abundance of statues, rosaries, jewelry and gifts. All proceeds are donated to the parish and used for a variety of purposes, including the annual bus trip to Washington DC's March for Life, sending Christmas cards each year to every priest in the diocese, and supplying gifts for special parish events. The shop has also been paying for the legal bills of the Oblates of St. Jude, incurred at the time of Mater Ecclesiae's formation.

According to Father Pasley, "Our shop is a great place for people to come and buy religious objects, but even more importantly, it's a great source for books and missals, which are so essential for understanding and deepening our faith."

The books, in fact, are the shop's biggest sellers. They are ordered by volunteer David O'Kane. While many volunteers have helped out over the years, Mr. O'Kane, who is retired from full-time employment, now staffs the shop most Sundays, and works on Mondays to reconcile, place orders, and stock the shelves.

"This is interesting," he said. "I like the people I meet. You can just trust everybody." One sign of that trust is the store's honor system. If no one is manning the counter, customers can sign themselves out and leave the money.



*David O'Kane*

Mr. DiStefano, who gained his business expertise by operating his own business for many years, continues his involvement. He handles the finances, approves all orders, and oversees the shop's operation.

If you ask Mr. DiStefano why he gives so much of his time to Mater Ecclesiae, you will invariably get an answer straight from his heart. "I do it for Our Lord, Our Lady, Saint Pio, for the Church. Without a doubt this is a very special place. Mater Ecclesiae is a flower flowering in the pines."

## Restorations for the Communion of Saints

From the beginning, Catholics have credited the beauty of art with drawing them closer to God. Parishioner Joseph Johns experienced this, in an unexpected way, when he began repainting traditional statues.

Mr. Johns first developed an interest in ceramics when he saw a young friend creating and painting ceramic pieces. He wanted to create his own nativity scene, and soon learned the techniques.

“I said, ‘Teach me how to do it.’ I had never painted before.” That was in 1976. In recent years Mr. Johns has made good use of his skills at Mater Ecclesiae.



*Joseph and Alice Johns with a crucifix he painted and restored.*

Drawing inspiration from traditional artists, he has repainted many statues that were showing signs of age, including the Infant of Prague donated by organist Karl Tricomi, which is now located in

schoolroom #3. He touched up the chapel’s Stations of the Cross and a beautiful crucifix, and repainted all of the outdoor statues. He has also restored many peeling and chipped statues that belong to fellow parishioners and friends, all without charge because, he says, “It’s a labor of love.”

His work has not only brought him closer to the Faith, but along with his bicycle repair avocation, has drawn curious neighborhood children and teens to his workshop, where Johns teaches them about God.

“We started an informal Catechism class,” he said, “and now two of the boys are going to Confession. What we teach depends on the needs of the children.”

Mr. Johns and his wife, Alice, who have five grown children of their own, live in Northeast Philadelphia. Recently, their prayers for their family have been answered. “I had been saying the Stations of the Cross for two years, and now our son and grandson just came back to the Church,” Mr. Johns said.

Before Mr. Johns came to Mater Ecclesiae, many traditional statues were repaired by long-time parishioner Ann Segó. Aging statues left by previous owners were peeling, chipping, and even broken. Although she had no prior experience, Mrs. Segó, seeing the need, took on several projects. She restored the large St. Jude statue on the right side of the sanctuary,

replastering and painting it. She reattached the arm on the St. Michael statue and worked on two others of St. Anne. “The Holy Spirit used me,” she says, modestly. “I was amazed that the statues came out looking brand new.” Why do traditional Catholic



*Ann Segó*

churches put so much emphasis on images of the saints? According to the Second Council of Nicea, which particularly addressed this issue, “The honour paid to an image traverses it, reaching the model, and he who venerates the image, venerates the person represented in that image.”

*Mater Ecclesiae  
Roman Catholic Church  
261 Cross Keys Road  
Berlin, NJ 08009-9431  
Rectory Phone 856-753-3408*

[www.Materecclesiae.org](http://www.Materecclesiae.org)