



Baby Jesus statue repaired: Man shows remorse for his actions, church offers forgiveness

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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EDWARDSVILLE - The legendary **baby Jesus statue** is back at its home at **St. Boniface Church** on Buchanan Street in Edwardsville.

The baby Jesus figurine suffered damages in early January 2016. The statue's arms and fingers had to be repaired and reattached by Autenrieb Studios in Edwardsville. A Florissant, Mo., resident, **Matthew J. Fellhauer**, then 25, was arrested for one count of Theft Under \$500 and one count of Criminal Damage to Property in connection with the incident.

The legendary statue was discarded and discovered on the Watershed Nature Center grounds in Edwardsville. The **Edwardsville Police Department** tracked down the suspect primarily through social media. The figurine was reported missing Jan. 4, 2016.

Fortunately, there is a positive ending to this story. On Christmas Eve after the 4:15 p.m. Mass at St. Boniface, the baby Jesus statue will return to its natural home in the historic St. Boniface Church nativity scene.



Felhauer and **St. Boniface Priest Jeffrey H. Goeckner** and several St. Boniface members have communicated an immense amount since the incident occurred. Goeckner and the church decided to drop the charges. Felhauer agreed to pay for the work to repair the figurine. Felhauer also has expressed sincere remorse about what he did, Goeckner said.

“When he had to go to court, he would have been charged with vandalism and theft and I decided with the Parish Council after we talked to him to have mercy with the young man,” Goeckner said.

“He is a nice kid and made a silly mistake. He lost his job at the time because of this, but because all the charges were dropped he has obtained another good job in Missouri,” he said. “He felt so awful he did something he wouldn’t normally do if he hadn’t been in the condition he was at the time. The State’s Attorney’s office recommended he make restitution and he did that.”

Father Goeckner said the Catholic Church had a “Year of Mercy” in 2015 issued by Pope Francis and he thought the move of the Parish Council was an ideal example in the baby Jesus statue situation.

“I think it is a great example of charity and mercy,” the priest said. “We were all going through a special time last year with the year of forgiveness in the church. We wanted to forgive him; that is how bad we felt for him (Felhauer).”

“There are consequences for all our actions and he paid the consequences in this situation. My sermon for Christmas this year will be using this whole example of being charitable,” he said. “We have to pay a price, but sometimes people can grow in a different, renewed way. He certainly has grown that way.”

The hope for Father Goeckner and the rest of the St. Boniface congregation is that Matthew Felhauer will continue to turn his life around.

“He expressed gratitude and was glad we did not press charges,” the priest said. “He said the reason he was able to get his present job was because the church was so kind to him about the situation.

“It’s about doing the right thing and sometimes people make bad choices,” he said. “It’s about doing the right thing and that was a perfect act of charity and mercy.”

The life-size nativity scene is now going up in front of St. Boniface. The display is a long-standing church tradition and is nearly iconic, with hundreds of people stopping by to view it and take photos each year. In a fitting tribute, after the St. Boniface Christmas Eve Mass, Father Goeckner and others in attendance will move the service outdoors to the nativity scene.

“We will bless the image and take it out to the manger,” Goeckner said. “It is a perfect way to celebrate Christmas.”

