



Baby Jesus figurine is back where it belongs on Christmas Day in front of St. Boniface Church

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
December 25 2016 6:22 AM



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EDWARDSVILLE - Christmas Eve Mass is always special at **St. Boniface Church** on Buchanan Street in Edwardsville, but this one was especially special as the historic baby Jesus figurine made its way back to the manger.

The baby Jesus statue was taken and 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 in connection with the case, but the church dropped all charges.

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 them to have mercy with the young man,” Goeckner said. “He is a nice kid and made a silly mistake.”

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. “It’s a nativity scene that has been around for about 100 years. It is also a legend for the people of Edwardsville. People drive by this day after after day during the Christmas season and acknowledge Christ’s birth. When that was taken, away it saddened the community and saddened us.

However, it was found, repaired and painted. Tonight, the young man, Matthew J. Felhauer, came back and returned it to the manger scene. It was a deal we negotiated with him and the State’s Attorney. Instead of pressing charges, we asked for restitution that he would be with us here on Christmas Eve. I handed off the image to him and it is home for the rest of the Christmas season.”

After Mass ended on Christmas Eve at St. Boniface Church as planned, Felhauer, Father Goeckner and church members filed out to the manger and baby Jesus was returned to his long-time home in the manger just in time for Christmas.

It’s likely none of the St. Boniface Church members and the Edwardsville community will forget this Christmas, seeing the figurine back in its normal place.