

Shrine funds sought

Campaign starts to keep religious facility afloat

By SHELLEY GRIESHOP
sgrieshop@dailystandard.com

MARIA STEIN — A fundraising campaign has begun to ensure the continuing operation of the historic and long-standing Shrine of the Holy Relics.

Facility director Don Rosenbeck said uncertainty about future financial support of the shrine from its parent organization — the Sisters of the Precious Blood in Dayton — prompted the recent creation of the Pledge Partners program, he said.

"We're trying to make this place (financially) stand on its own," said Rosenbeck, who took the helm at the relic shrine in late June.

Each of the last five years the Precious Blood has given the shrine \$125,000 to cover expenses not met by revenue generated locally. The goal of Pledge Partners is to replace that amount.

Yearly expenses for the shrine average \$298,728, compared to revenues of \$173,190 mainly generated through fundraisers, bequests and proceeds from the annual Maria Stein Country Fest.

The shrine's biggest expense — 56



Photo submitted

Officials at the Maria Stein Shrine of the Holy Relics have begun a fundraising project, Pledge Partners, to ensure the financial future of the center. A projected lack of funding by the Dayton-based Sisters of the Precious Blood and other factors prompted the campaign, officials said.

percent of overall costs — is salaries for the four nuns who manage the day-to-day operations and two part-time maintenance workers.

Much concern is centered around the median age of the nuns at the facility along St. Johns Road and at the motherhouse in Dayton, Rosenbeck said.

"The average age of the sisters is now 77," he said, explaining the ongoing drop in membership means uncertainty for the future. "Covering the shrine's deficit indefinitely will not be possible for the congregation."

To date, there are 169 sisters in the Precious Blood community. Local nuns assigned to the shrine include Sisters Barbara Ann Hoying, Regina Albers, Mary Ellen Andrisin and Mary Lou Schmursal.

The aging three-story brick building, its courtyard and sprawling landscape is embedded in local his-

See **SHRINE**, back page

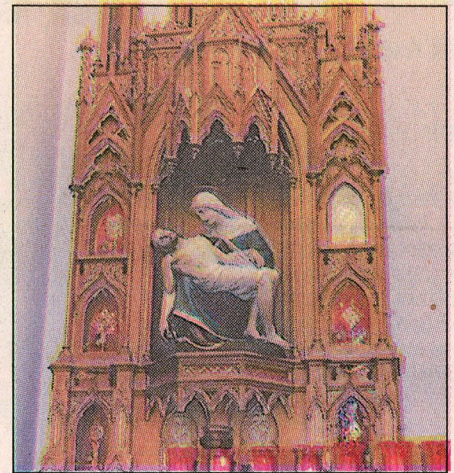
How to pledge

To contribute to the Pledge Partners campaign, contact Don Rosenbeck or Sister Mary Lou Schmursal at 419-925-4532 or e-mail d.rosenbeck@MariaStein-Shrine.org or development@MariaSteinShrine.org.

Donors are asked to consider committing to a specific dollar amount each of the next five years to ensure the shrine's financial viability.

The Shrine of the Holy Relics along St. Johns Road is the former motherhouse of the Sisters of the Precious Blood congregation and is home to the relic shrine, a historical museum, a chapel and gift shop.

— Shelley Grieshop



Shelley Grieshop/The Daily Standard

Pictured is a statue in the chapel at the Maria Stein Shrine of the Holy Relics. The shrine and its surrounding grounds draw about 20,000 visitors each year.

Shrine

(Continued from front page)

tory. In 1846, the site was established as a Catholic convent and motherhouse for the sisters who arrived from Switzerland. Later the motherhouse was moved to Dayton.

In 1875, the shrine was chosen as a sacred place to display religious relics and currently has the second-largest collection of relics from saints in the United States.

The site has remained a place of constant prayer for nearly 165 years. Its Shrine of the Holy Relics, Heritage Museum and Pilgrim Gift Shop annually draw more than 20,000 visitors of all ages from all over the world.

"It's a real gem," said Donna Grube, executive director of the Auglaize and Mercer County's

Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB). "It's very, very important and valuable in bringing multiple busloads of visitors to our area."

Grube, who serves on the shrine's public relations committee, said she often gives day tours with time spent equally at area churches and the relic shrine. Visitors tell her they find a "real sense of peace" as they wander about the grounds, she said.

And many come back, Grube added.

"It remains one of our biggest attractions," she said.

Rosenbeck believes more lay people will eventually be tapped to keep the doors of the shrine open. But that doesn't mean the sisters' presence will disappear. His plan is to use audio/video equipment to

record their presentations for touchscreen kiosks to be placed in the lobby, the relic chapel and the museum. He estimates that project will cost \$30,000 to \$50,000.

"I'm currently writing a grant proposal," he said.

Rosenbeck said he's off to a good start. He already has an informational VHS recording of Sister Cordelia Gast, founder of the Heritage Museum, who died in May 2002.

Officials also plan to increase events at the relic shrine such as art shows and concerts. Grube hopes local residents, as well as visiting tourists, continue to seek the many resources the shrine offers.

"We take so much for granted that we often forget what we have in our own backyard," she said.