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### THE CULT OF SAINTS IN PAST AND PRESENT

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Fig. 4. Wayside altar in the procession park during the Polish pilgrimage in Heiloo (May 2004) (Photo: T. Swinkels)

# JOURNEYING IN HOLINESS: FROM SHRINE TO PILGRIMAGE CENTER

EDWARD FOLEY OFM Cap

## Introduction

On July 31, 1957 Capuchin<sup>1</sup> Friar Solanus Casey died in Detroit, Michigan. The end of this remarkable life was also the beginning of another extraordinary saga which continues to this day. That new story is embodied in the Solanus Casey Center – a 44,000 square foot pilgrimage site in Detroit, Michigan.<sup>2</sup> It is a tale of the contemporary search for the holy, as well as the challenge of shaping that experience of the holy so that its centrifugal rather than centripetal dynamic is enhanced.

This article will give readers a glimpse of this journey into the holy by first providing a sketch of the life and influence of Solanus Casey. Then we will turn to the design and construction of the Solanus Casey Center as a particular response to this life and mission. The article will end with a few reflections on the theological implications of this newly designed space.

## The life of Solanus Casey

Bernard Casey was born to Irish immigrant farmers on 25 November 1870 near Prescott, Wisconsin.<sup>3</sup> The sixth of sixteen children, 'Barney'

<sup>1</sup> The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin is an international Roman Catholic fraternity of men who follow the gospel of Jesus Christ according the rule of life written by St. Francis of Assisi. They trace their specific foundation to Matteo da Bascio in Italy in 1528; Matteo was seeking to recover what he believed was a more faithful observance of the rule written by St. Francis. There are roughly 11,000 Capuchin Franciscan friars in the world.

<sup>2</sup> Information on the Center is available at [www.solanuscasy.org](http://www.solanuscasy.org) (24.iv.04).

<sup>3</sup> The facts of Solanus Casey's life are largely drawn from M. CROSBY (ed.): *Solanus Casey: The official account of a virtuous American life* (New York 2000). Also see M. CROSBY: *Thank God ahead of time: The life and spirituality of Solanus Casey* (Quincy IL 1998); C. ODELL: *Fr. Solanus: The story of Solanus Casey, O.F.M. Cap.* (Huntington IN 1988).

was nurtured in a strong religious environment. His uncle Maurice was a Catholic priest, and his name sake – Barney's older brother Maurice – entered the seminary in 1883. Because of family obligations, Barney did not complete grade school until he was 17. After a few more years of work, contributing to the support of his parents and siblings, Barney entered the high school seminary in Milwaukee when he was almost 21 years old. He eventually made it into the college of St. Francis de Sales Seminary, but poor grades led to his dismissal after one year. At the suggestion of his seminary superiors, Barney made contact with the Capuchin Franciscan friars. On Christmas Eve 1896, he entered St. Bonaventure Monastery in Detroit, and soon after began his novitiate, taking the name Solanus. Solanus continued his studies with the Capuchins, but manifested some of the same difficulties with studies that he had encountered at the diocesan seminary. Because of his obvious spirituality Solanus was allowed to be ordained in 1904, but because of his poor academic record it was decided that he was to remain a *simplex* priest, never allowed to hear confessions or preach formal sermons.

His first assignment was a parish in Yonkers, New York, where Solanus eventually assumed responsibilities as the monastery doorkeeper and receptionist. Word of his compassion and gentleness quickly spread, as did reports about his gifts of healing and prophecy. By his third assignment, a monastery in Manhattan, reports of 'favours received' by people who consulted Fr. Solanus were so numerous that in 1923 his Capuchin superior asked him to keep a notebook of special cases and reported healings related to his consultations. Between 1923 and the time of his death, Solanus filled at least seven notebooks with such stories.<sup>4</sup>

In 1924 Solanus was reassigned to St. Bonaventure monastery in Detroit. Within a few weeks of his arrival, an increasing number of people came to seek the counsel of the new porter. Within a few months, the numbers were so great that the front office space had to be enlarged. The reports of 'favours received' multiplied. An important extension of Solanus' work was the development of Detroit's first soup kitchen by

<sup>4</sup> One example out of many of these favours will suffice here: A 73-year old woman suffering of a double cataract was very anxious to undergo eye surgery. In November 1923 she promised to do all in her power for the missions, if the cataract could be cured and she could wear her glasses again without operation. On January 20<sup>th</sup> she returned, wearing her glasses but not yet satisfied. She renewed her promise and on February 14<sup>th</sup> she returned jubilant and perfectly cured.

the Capuchins. Capuchins had always shared their food with those who came to the monastery door, but during 1929 that number rose to 200-300 a day. Another friar began serving food in a building down the street from the monastery, while Solanus solicited the generosity of those who came to him to feed the poor. Today the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, in two locations, serves over 60,000 people a month, and distributes from its warehouse approximately 3.5 million pounds of food to needy families each month.<sup>5</sup>

In 1945 Solanus was transferred to New York, and then to a friary in Indiana. Through all this period requests for favours and advice poured in to Solanus, sometimes 300 letters a day, so that his superiors appointed secretaries for him. By 1955 Solanus' age and infirmities had begun to take their toll. In 1956 he returned to Detroit for the last time and by May of the following year Solanus was hospitalized. On Wednesday, 31 July 1957 he died at St. John's Hospital in Detroit.

Because of the expected crowds of people, the wake for Solanus was held at a regular mortuary rather than in the friary chapel. Though visitation was to begin at 1:00 p.m. on Thursday, the line began to form at 5:00 a.m. Thousands paid their respects until 2:00 a.m. on Friday morning. Later that day the body was brought back to St. Bonaventure. It is estimated that 20,000 offered a final farewell to Solanus. The following day he was buried in the small cemetery behind the monastery.

### The phenomenon of visitors and the decision to build

From the day of his burial, pilgrims have journeyed to Solanus' grave site in Detroit. Though official statistics were never kept, the consistent flow of pilgrims as well as the continued reports of 'favours received' were certainly two factors that kept the memory of Solanus Casey alive. In 1966 the official process for the cause of his canonization as a saint in the Roman Catholic Church began with the opening of a local investigation by the Archdiocese of Detroit.<sup>6</sup> As part of that process in 1987, Solanus' body was exhumed and examined by church officials. He was

<sup>5</sup> Further information on this organization is available at [www.cskdetroit.org](http://www.cskdetroit.org) (24.iv.04).

<sup>6</sup> Current canonical norms regarding the procedure to be followed for causes of saints are contained in the Apostolic Constitution *Divinus Perfectionis Magister*, promulgated by John Paul II on January 25, 1983.

clothed in a new Capuchin habit, and permanently buried within the north transept of the newly renovated chapel at St. Bonaventure. In 1995 Solanus Casey became the first US born male to be proclaimed 'venerable', the last step in the Roman Catholic Church's process before beatification and then canonization. At the date of this writing the cause for his beatification continues.

By the mid 1990's it was estimated that people were making over 60,000 visits a year to Solanus' tomb. Believing that this phenomenon was only going to grow, especially if Solanus was beatified, the leadership of the Detroit Province of Capuchins decided in January of 1997 that within two years, "a new Fr. Solanus Casey Center was to be built."<sup>7</sup> The process of designing and building the Center would actually take almost three times as long to complete.

The primary responsibility for the oversight of this project was given to 'The Solanus Commission', an internal commission of the province set up in 1995 and eventually consisting of nine Capuchin friars. The mission of that commission, as articulated in 1996, was:

Given the inevitability of the beatification of our brother Solanus Casey, we believe that we should be proactive (through education, outreach, consensus building and worship) as to how the spirit of Solanus reflects and can animate the spirit, vision and ministry of Capuchin Ministries on Mount Elliott Avenue (Detroit), the Province of St. Joseph, the North American Capuchin Conference, the Capuchin-Franciscan Order and the wider church.

The membership consisted of the vice-postulator for the cause for Solanus Casey, the coordinator of the Solanus Guild (an organization founded in 1960 to keep alive the memory of Solanus Casey), two theologians, the local Capuchin religious superior, a representative of the North American Capuchin Conference, an 'at large' representative of the Province of St. Joseph, a local Capuchin 'project coordinator' and fund raiser, and the vicar provincial who served as liaison with the Provincial leadership.

In 1997 the Solanus Commission hired Richard Vosko as its lead consultant,<sup>8</sup> and Hammel, Green and Abrahamson (HGA)<sup>9</sup> as the

<sup>7</sup> *Triennial Report (1996-1999)* of the Solanus Commission for Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> A Roman Catholic priest of the Diocese of Albany, New York, Vosko has been working throughout the United States and Canada as a liturgical designer and consultant since 1970. Further information on him is available at [www.rvosko.com](http://www.rvosko.com) (27.iv.04).

<sup>9</sup> Founded in 1953, HGA is an award winning architecture, engineering and planning firm whose main offices are in Minneapolis MN. Further information about the firm, and John Justus, a principle of that firm, is available at [www.hga.com](http://www.hga.com) (27.iv.04)

architectural firm for the project, with John Justus as the lead architect. Another key member of the design team was the New York Firm DMCD,<sup>10</sup> specialists in museum design, with Mike Callan as the lead designer. Toward the end of the project, the Commission hired the landscape architectural firm of Grissim-Metz-Andriese Associates from Northfield MI. The lead landscape architect, especially instrumental in the shaping of the creation garden, was Paul Andriese.

### Rethinking the holy: From shrine to pilgrimage center

The long process of design development began with the collection of data from various internal and external sources which contributed to the development of a *Planning Program*, authored by Richard Vosko. Critical to this phase was a definitive process of defining and clarifying the nature and function of the proposed Center – a definition which would provide the philosophical and theological foundation for the design process. Two key prisms for crafting this spatial definition were 1) the personal charism of Solanus, 2) and the importance of 'mission' in Solanus' own vision, and that of the Capuchin community.

It was recognized that Solanus Casey was an accessible 'saint', someone whom ordinary folk could both approach and emulate. He was not a stigmatic nor a learned mystic. As someone who had performed poorly in school and never was entrusted with any position of leadership, Solanus had great natural appeal to very ordinary folk. It was agreed, therefore, that in the design of a Center bearing his name, it was important to emphasize that sanctity was something ordinary people could attain. Coupled with this was the vital concern not to develop a shrine where people would go to touch the extraordinary and then return to their ordinary lives. Rather than a shrine that would house the holy, the Center was envisioned as a place of pilgrimage.<sup>11</sup> Shrines by definition

<sup>10</sup> DMCD Inc. is an award winning museum design firm located in New York. Further information about the firm is available at [www.dmcd.com](http://www.dmcd.com) (27.iv.04)

<sup>11</sup> The literature on pilgrimage, especially in the Christian west, is vast. A few select works on this topic include: S. COLEMAN & J. ELSNER: *Pilgrimage: Past and present in the world religions* (Cambridge MA 1995); L. DAVIDSON & M. DUNN-WOOD: *Pilgrimages in the Middle Ages: A research guide* (Hamden CT 1992 = Garland medieval bibliographies 16); M. DUNN (ed.): *The pilgrimage to Compostela in the Middle Ages* (New York 1996); R. FINUCANE: *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular beliefs in medieval England* (New York 1995); L. HOFFMAN: *Sacred places and the pilgrimage of life* (Chicago 1991); V. & E. TURNER: *Image and pilgrimage in Christian culture: Anthropological perspectives* (Oxford 1978).

are places, but a pilgrimage is a journey in which the act of returning home is as important as the travel to the original destination. Coupling this notion with the image of mission and service so central to the belief of Solanus, led the planning team to consider how the experience of the Solanus Center as a moment in one's pilgrimage through life could inspire visitors to live differently and, in particular, be more engaged in service in their own communities after returning home. This perspective culminated in the following 'mission statement' for the Center:

The Mission of the Solanus Center is to provide opportunities for all people to be challenged by the message of Jesus Christ as lived by model Saints and Christians, Capuchin Franciscan Friars, and by Solanus Casey who taught that "religion is the science of our happy relationship and providential dependence on God and our neighbors". More specifically, through its ambiance, programming and ministers the Center will seek to empower pilgrims to translate their experiences into a vital spirituality and a deepened love of God and neighbor, especially through ministry to the sick and poor.<sup>12</sup>

Parallel to developing this vision of the new Center, the consultants crafted a story line that would stand behind the design and weave its way through the Center. While there was to be a museum in the Center itself, this development of a pervasive story line reflected the concern of the Commission that the entire Center and not simply a single museum space be imbued with the larger story of the spiritual journey made particular in the life of Solanus Casey. Consultant Richard Vosko was instrumental in shaping a story line pegged to the '7 C's':

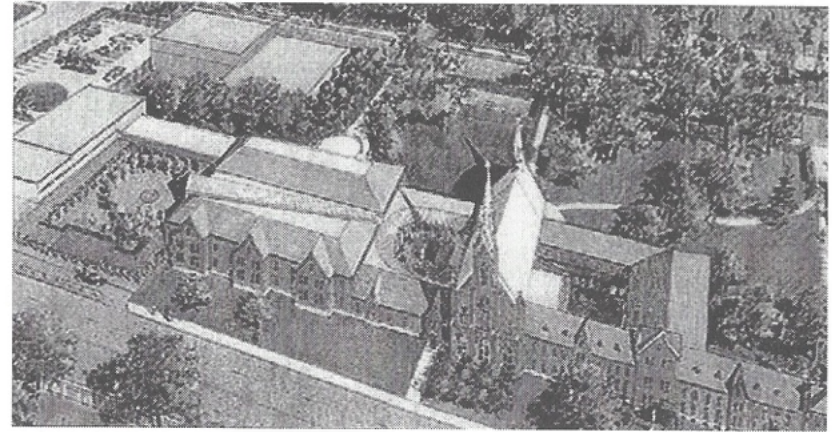
Creation – Christ – Christianity – Catholicism –  
Capuchin – Canonization – Casey.

This local pilgrimage would begin with a creation garden, an image deemed quite appropriate for a Center that was to reflect not only the spirit of Solanus Casey, but the foundational spirituality of the Capuchin-Franciscan community to which he belonged.<sup>13</sup> From the garden pilgrims would pass through the Christ doors, into a space that would successively lead the pilgrim through reflections on Christianity

<sup>12</sup> Minutes of the Solanus Commission of the Province of St. Joseph, 18 July 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Francis of Assisi (1181-1225) is the Roman Catholic patron saint of ecology. One of his more celebrated prayers is his 'Canticle of the Creatures'; see R. ARMSTRONG, J.A. HELLMAN & W. SHORT (eds.): *Francis of Assisi: Early documents* vol. I: *The saint* (New York 1999) 114-115.

and Catholicism, then an introduction to the Capuchins. The pilgrimage route would continue through reflections on the nature of canonization, and finally lead to the tomb of Solanus Casey. What follows is a more detailed description of the unfolding of this story line along the pilgrimage path that visitors encounter when visiting the Solanus Casey Center (ill. 1).



Ill. 1. The layout of the Solanus Casey Center (photo: HGA at [www.hga.com](http://www.hga.com))

### Entering the garden

When one arrives at the Center through the parking lot, or a visitor's drop off point, pilgrims are invited into processional paths which lead through a 'sheep gate'<sup>14</sup> realized by artist Rick Findora as a delicate wrought iron gate depicting the sun and the moon in the cloud drenched heavens. The sheep gate leads into the creation garden, an large open square surrounded by a covered walkway.

As designer Mike Callan explains, "The natural beauty of a courtyard garden is a starting point for pilgrims to the Solanus Casey Center, a place to cleanse themselves of distractions, to begin to focus on the meaning of their visit."<sup>15</sup> A pathway – crafted out of brick pavers engraved with donors' names – winds through this garden, landscaped

<sup>14</sup> This image is taken from the discourse recorded in John's Gospel in which Jesus refers to himself as the 'sheep gate' (John 10: 7).

<sup>15</sup> 'Local artist chosen to create symbol for religious center', in *Arab-American news* 19: 879 (14-20 December 2003) 14.

piece of petrified bog-oak wood – taken from County Armagh where Solanus' parents were born – rising from a base crafted of Kilkenny slate. The text, originally intended to appear in English and Celtic, summons the ancestral language of the Casey clan. A commission for a figure representing Brother Wind has been extended to African-American artist Woodrow Nash of Akron, Ohio.<sup>20</sup> This 'African nouveau' work, combining African and European influences, is a large wind chime, whose sides are etched with African animal insets.

### Entering Christianity through the Christ doors

There is a long tradition for Christians, especially in the West, for translating the 'sheep gate' imagery into 'door' imagery for Christ.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, it is not uncommon to find doors of Christian churches not only adorned with Christ imagery,<sup>22</sup> but even named as a 'Christ door'.<sup>23</sup> It was this strand of the tradition which led the design team to envision the main doors into the Solanus Center as Christ doors, which would give demarcation and impetus to the pilgrim's spiritual journey. Such doors were also designed to evoke the simple ministry of Solanus Casey as doorkeeper. To that end, the exterior main doors to the Center were fabricated in rich but unadorned wood, emulating the wooden doors of the old monasteries that Solanus serviced.

Passing through the exterior doors, the pilgrim comes face to face with the Christ doors. Designed by Stephen Knapp<sup>24</sup> of Worcester, Massachusetts, the doors are made of kiln formed glass and, combined with the transom over the door, measure ten feet high and six feet across. River-like patterns on the doors and transom, punctuated with the words 'ask', 'seek' and 'knock' (Mt 7: 7), provide a warm and illuminated threshold, beckoning the pilgrims into the main body of the Center (ill. 3).

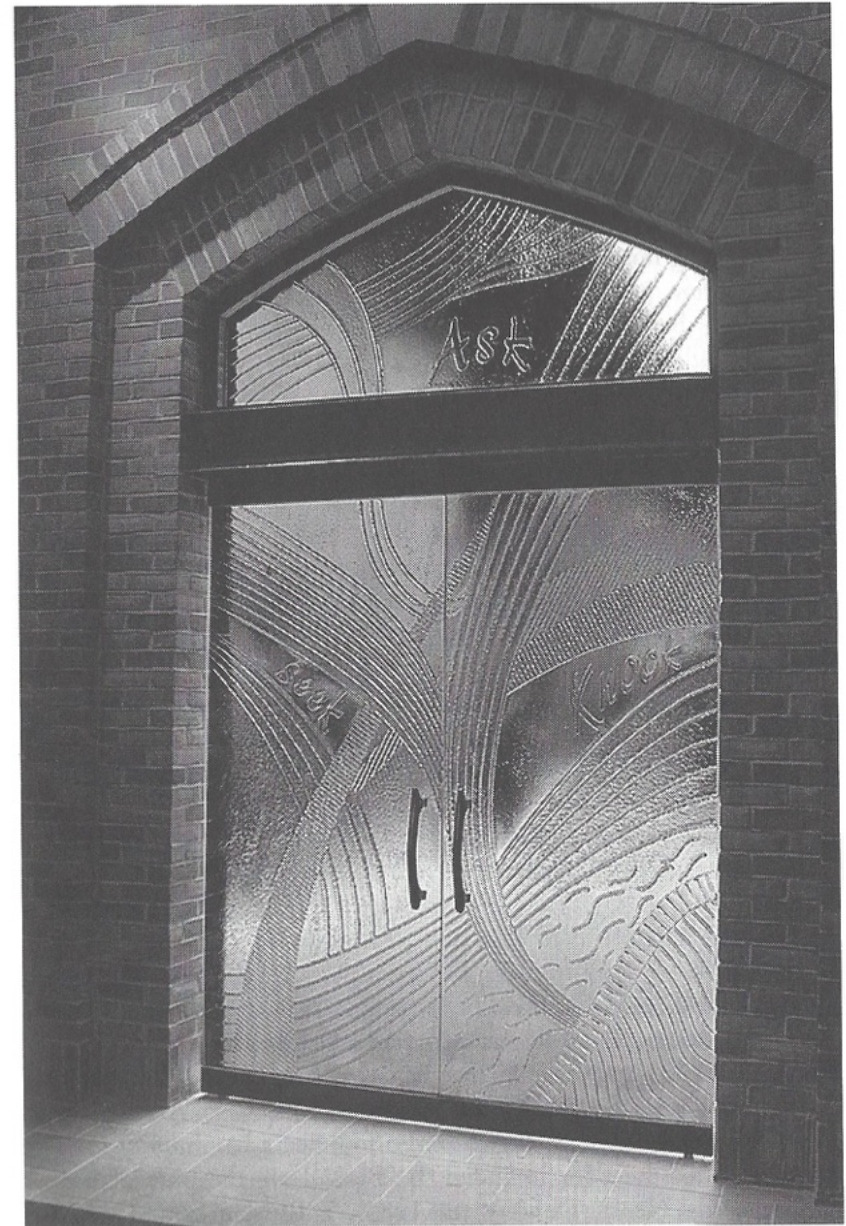
<sup>20</sup> More information on Mr. Nash, as well as the concept of 'African nouveau' can be found at [www.woodrownash.com](http://www.woodrownash.com) (24.iv.04).

<sup>21</sup> Recently, for example, Pope John Paul II played with this image in his Christmas Message for 1999.

<sup>22</sup> E.g., the bronze Northern door of the Florence Baptistery by Italian sculptor Lorenzo Ghiberti (d. 1455).

<sup>23</sup> E.g., the North doors of the Christ chapel at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter MN.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on this artist, see [www.stephenknapp.com](http://www.stephenknapp.com) (24.iv.04).



Ill. 3. The Christ doors (photo: Steven Knapp at [www.stephenknapp.com](http://www.stephenknapp.com))

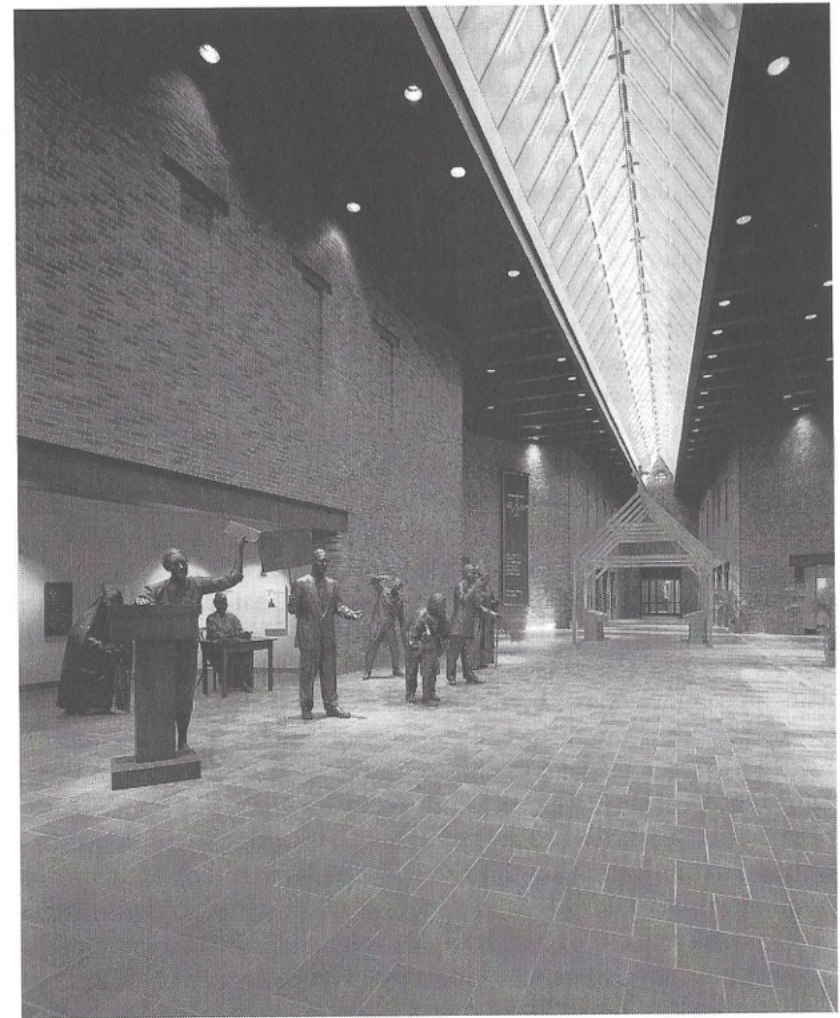
After passing through the Christ doors the pilgrim stands in the main room of the Center, a large V-shaped brick concourse, approximately 132 feet in length and 26 feet high, crowned by a skylight, flanked by a tongue and groove ceiling of Douglas fir which runs the length of the room. The floor is a slate-like porcelain tile. The rich brown tones of brick, fir and floor in an elegant but simple room evoke the colors and simplicity of Capuchin life, and Solanus Casey.

As the pilgrims enter, a receptionist's desk is to their right, but the true reception is a set of free standing, life size figures to their left, embodying the Beatitudes as found in the gospel of Matthew (Mt 5: 3-12). The individuals selected as subjects for this display were obviously Christian but not necessarily Roman Catholic. The Solanus Commission decided that all the individuals depicted here needed to be deceased. There was further concern for both local connection and pluriformity in this collection.

Crafted by master sculptor Karen Atta of New York City,<sup>25</sup> eight contemporary figures were created to embody the Christian virtues reflected in Matthew's Beatitudes. In creating these stunning depictions, Ms. Atta first sculpted the heads of the subjects in clay, and created the rest of the figures with body casts from live models. These two pieces were then fired in nontoxic fiberglass with an acrylic polymer base. The resulting sculptures are incredibly lifelike, both inviting and challenging to the pilgrims who encounter them (ill. 4).

The subjects of the grouping and their corresponding 'Beatitudes' are: 1) "Blessed are the poor": Dorothy Day (d. 1980), a Roman Catholic lay woman, social justice advocate and cofounder of the Catholic Worker Movement; 2) "Blessed are those who mourn": Jean Donovan (d. 1980), an American Roman Catholic lay missionary, native of Michigan, who was martyred in El Salvador at the age of 27; 3) "Blessed are the nonviolent": Dr. Takashi Nagai (d. 1951), Japanese physician, convert to Roman Catholicism and peace advocate who experienced the atomic bombing of Nagasaki that hastened his death; 4) "Blessed are the merciful": Mother Theresa of Calcutta (d. 1997), an Albanian born Roman Catholic woman religious, who founded a community to serve the poorest of the poor in India; 5) "Blessed are the pure of heart": Catherine de Heuck Doherty (d. 1985), a Russian born Orthodox Christian, latter embracing Roman Catholicism, pioneering lay leader

<sup>25</sup> For more information on this artist, see [www.attinc.com](http://www.attinc.com) (24.iv.04).



Ill. 4. The Beatitudes (photo: Laszlo Regos at [www.laszlofoto.com](http://www.laszlofoto.com))

in North American, who established the Madonna House community influenced by the ideals of St. Francis; 6) "Blessed are the peacemakers": Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1968), an African-American Baptist Minister, pivotal figure in the civil rights movement in the United States, and martyred apostle of nonviolence; 7) "Blessed are those who suffer persecution": Oscar Romero (1980), Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Salvador, advocate for the poor and voiceless, assassinated while



celebrating Eucharist; 8) "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice": Monsignor Clement Kern (d. 1983), labor activist dubbed Detroit's 'Labor priest', pastor of a church at the heart of the Mexican-barrio in Detroit, a champion of the poor.

### Catholicism, the Capuchins, canonization and the Casey Museum

As pilgrims move down the main hall, past the 'Beatitudes', they pass an auditorium on the right, designed to feel like a Capuchin 'choir' or small chapel for celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours. This gathering space is designed for orientation, video presentations on the life of Solanus, and can alternately be employed as a place for offering spiritual conferences to the pilgrims and even worship. Returning to the main hall, pilgrims were suppose to encounter a symbolic representation of 'Catholic' which was to provide the move between Christianity and Capuchin. The Solanus Commission played with many ideas here. One of the more intriguing was a laser writing out the Nicene Creed in six languages on a banner suspended in the midst of the main hall. That idea was too costly to realize, and the Commission then considered a large mobile symbolizing the seven sacraments, or large silk banners attempting the same. To date, no commission has been extended for this element.

Further down the main hall the pilgrims enter a *rotunda*, approximately 44 feet in diameter set off by a wooden floor, designed to introduce the 'Capuchin' element to the story line. At the center of the rotunda is a 'ghosted' church structure, representing the first Capuchin church built in Detroit on this site in 1883. Within the ghosted structure framed in white wood, are two display cabinets with information on the history of the Capuchins in Detroit and some artifacts from the beginnings of this local Capuchin community.

To the right of this structure hangs a large silk screen banner carrying an image of Solanus Casey on a rich dark material, reminiscent of the material employed for making the Capuchin habit. To the left of the structure is the entrance to the dining area, flanked by two complementary silk screen banners. The dining room that seats approximately 200 guests contains large framed panels providing photographs and information about the original Capuchin Soup Kitchen and the current Soup Kitchen ministry. A wall of block glass, which was part of the original Soup Kitchen, has been reintroduced into the new Center, and now separates the dining room from the kitchen area.

The concept of canonization – the sixth 'C' in the story line – is introduced by a series of five panels further down the main hall. The first of the panels explains the four 'steps' to sainthood according to the Roman Catholic process: servant of God, venerable, blessed and saint. Following this initial panel, each of the following four pieces provides some details about the progressive steps towards canonization, illustrating each step with pictures of four individuals currently at that stage in the process. The representative group of sixteen women and men, lay and ordained, dominant culture and people of color, from within and outside the United States is intended as a further 'mirror' for the visitor, reflecting some aspect of holiness that can be emulated in the lives of the pilgrims.

To the right of these panels is the Solanus Casey museum. The museum is divided according to the chronology of Solanus' life into five areas. The first section is about the Casey family. There are wall murals on Solanus' childhood and one depicting him with the two of his brothers who became priests. Dominant in this section is one large picture, taken of the Casey family in 1913 on the 50th wedding anniversary of Solanus' parents. Besides these large pieces of wall art, there are a series of smaller wooden lecterns that serve as the platform for picture albums of the Casey family.

The second section of the museum focuses on Solanus as a young man, depicting the various jobs he held. There is a mural that describes his work as a 16 year old in a lumber camp across the Mississippi River, and another of Stillwater prison in Minnesota, where 'Barney' briefly served as a prison guard, and where he struck up a friendship with the notorious bank robber Cole Younger. The last mural narrates his work as a trolley car conductor in Superior, Wisconsin. In 1891 he witnessed the stabbing death of a young woman while in this work, which seems to have been a turning point in his vocational discernment.

The third section of the museum covers his years of study and preparation for priesthood and religious life. Here the visitor is introduced to Barney's struggle with studies, his introduction to the Capuchins and his move to Detroit in 1896. Cole Younger had apparently given Barney a trunk, and it was this piece of luggage that accompanied him through these years of study, transition and eventual ordination as a simplex priest.

Pilgrims then come upon the reconstructed monastery cell that Solanus occupied in Detroit. It contains a simple bed, an old typewriter

perched atop a wooden crate, and a small table with a few books. In a case in front of the cell are displayed some of Solanus' few possessions: his sandals, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a rosary, a black skull cap, and his harmonica.

The last section of the museum features large glass cases displaying more artifacts from Solanus' life and ministry. One contains the vestments he wore for the last Mass that he celebrated, the chalice and paten that he ordinarily used for celebrating Mass, and his favorite red stole. Imbedded in the wall next to this case is a stained glass window from the church in which Solanus made the decision to become a priest. Another case holds his Capuchin habit, the violin he loved to play, a few favorite books, and one of the notebooks in which his superiors had requested that he record 'favors received'.

As one prepares to exit the museum, the pilgrim encounters a small bank of computers which contain the writings of Solanus, classified under various headings. These computer stations, which are also scattered throughout the museum, are intended to allow contemporary pilgrims to have a 'conversation' with Solanus and encounter his wisdom on topics ranging from church to spirituality.

On the left of the museum, behind the panels on 'canonization' is the 'learning center'. This space was designed as a resource for pilgrims to learn about opportunities for service and mission in their own communities. The hope was that the experience of the pilgrimage and the witness of Solanus would inspire them to holiness through mission when they returned home. Originally the Commission had hoped to set up databases, available through computer terminals, so pilgrims could research charities, soup kitchens, homeless shelters and the like, now operating in their own geographic location. To date this is the most underdeveloped aspect of the Center, and one which needs much further attention in the future.

### The Circle of Saints

The main hall of the Center is a V-shaped concourse that, as noted above, is approximately 132 feet from the inside threshold of the Christ doors to the threshold to the circle of the saints. The hall narrows from approximately 32 feet wide at the Christ doors, to about 15 feet at the passageway into the circle of saints (ill. 5). This narrowing of the hall in no way produces a feeling of confinement – flanked, as it is, by the



Ill. 5. The Circle of Saints (photo: Laszlo Regos at [www.laszlofoto.com](http://www.laszlofoto.com))

many large and inviting spaces such as dining room, auditorium, museum and learning center. As pilgrims weave there way in and out of these spaces down what feels like an open air street, they are invited to make their way through the final doorway and into a hemisphere of light. If one follows this semicircle of glass to the left, it leads to Solanus' tomb; to the right, it leads to the main body of the adjoining church. As the primary path for pilgrims on the way to the tomb, the designers intended to introduce the tomb area by way of a gallery of saints. In the words of the architect, we encounter the 'rookie saint' surrounded by the 'seasoned professionals'. The eight saints or blessed selected for this gallery were chosen because of their influence upon or resonance with the spirit of Solanus. The eight are: 1) Our Lady of Guadalupe, reflecting Solanus' great devotion to Mary, and in recognition of the very large number of Hispanics and Hispanic Roman Catholics in the United States today; 2) St. Francis of Assisi (d. 1226), the founder of the Franciscan Order and thus of the Capuchins, patron of Italy and of ecology; 3) St. Clare of Assisi (d. 1253), friend and companion of St. Francis, and founder of the religious community known as the Poor Clares; 4) St. Joseph, spouse of Mary, foster father of Jesus and patron of the Detroit Province of Capuchins; 5) St. Theresa of Lisieux (d. 1897), a

cloistered French Carmelite, patroness of the missions, and great favorite of Solanus; 6) Blessed Katherine Drexel (d. 1955), US born founder of the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament, dedicated to the service of Native and African Americans; 7) Martin de Porres (1639), a Peruvian of mixed race and Dominican lay brother, renowned for his humility and wisdom; 8) Elizabeth of Hungary (d. 1231), wife to Louis of Thuringia, celebrated for her austerity who, after her husband's death, joined the Third Order of St. Francis.

These saints are depicted on large panels of architectural glass (approximately 52 inches wide and 92 inches tall), which together create this hemisphere of sanctity in glass and light, overlooking a meditation garden. The meditation garden is itself a hemispheric space, approximately 44 feet at its widest, and 22 feet at its deepest. The grassy, open air hemisphere is punctuated with shrubs and marked by a large *Tau* cross,<sup>26</sup> approximately 4 feet high and 3 feet across. Pilgrims can see across the enclosure through a clear glass window to the tomb of Solanus.

The glass etchings of the saints by Ken von Roenn of Architectural Glass Art Inc. of Louisville, Kentucky,<sup>27</sup> while a little larger than life, were not envisioned as 'heroic' in design. The goal here – as throughout the entirety of the pilgrimage Center – was not to overwhelm the pilgrim in anyway. Rather, the hope was to invite them into an experience that would allow them not only to identify with Solanus, but to identify with the call to holiness that he sounded through his simple life. Similarly, this corona of saints was not intended to represent some untouchable standard of holiness, but rather to present hospitable 'friends of God', who beckon the pilgrim to become the same.

As the pilgrims face the hemisphere of light, behind them on the wall on either side of the doorway are hung a series of fourteen large murals – crafted from glazed pewabic ceramic tiles.<sup>28</sup> These art works

<sup>26</sup> *Tau* is the Greek letter 'T'; as a cross design, it emulates the capital 'T' with no vertical protrusion beyond the horizontal bar that crowns the cross. The biographer of St. Francis, Thomas of Celano (d. 1260) notes in *The treatise on the miracles of Saint Francis* that "He [Francis] favored the sign of the Tau over all others. With it alone he signed letters he sent, and painted it on the wall of cells everywhere." R. ARMSTRONG, J.A. HELLMAN & W. SHORT (eds.): *Francis of Assisi: Early documents* vol. II: *The founder* (New York 2000) 402.

<sup>27</sup> For more information on this company, see [www.againc.com](http://www.againc.com) (24.iv.04).

<sup>28</sup> This is a local Detroit product, celebrated for over a century; for more information on this product, see [www.pewabic.com](http://www.pewabic.com) (24.iv.04).

are symbolic representations of what the Roman Catholic Church calls the 'spiritual' and 'corporal' works of mercy.<sup>29</sup> Designed by artists from the 'Pewabic Tile Company', the subtle pastels of these murals – approximately 3 feet across and all framed with a partial rounded arch – artistically enhance this sun-drenched corridor. More than beautiful adornments, however, these works of art were intended to reflect and support the mission statement of the Center to "empower pilgrims to translate their experiences into a vital spirituality and a deepened love of God and neighbor, especially through ministry to the sick and poor."<sup>30</sup>

### The path divides: Reconciliation or tomb

Pilgrims have a choice at this juncture in the journey. Turning to the right, pilgrims are lead along a part of the hemisphere which invites them into personal encounter and reflection. On the first door to their right on this path they find the door to the 'reconciliation chapel'. The Sacrament of Penance has been an important ministry for the friars at St. Bonaventure Monastery for almost a century. In the past, this ministry was exercised in traditionally designed 'confessionals' located in the chapel. Repositioning the chapel of reconciliation – a meditative space with room for fifteen people, adjoined by two reconciliation rooms or 'confessionals' which allow for face to face or anonymous experiences of the sacrament – along this pilgrim's walk underscores that reconciliation is part of the pilgrimage to holiness. Within the chapel of reconciliation hangs a sculpture of St. Francis embracing the crucified Christ, and Christ responding (ill. 6). This classic Franciscan image has been rendered by Detroit artist Sergei Metrofanov in bronze and wood, the wooden cross etched with the phrase "stretch out your hand to heal"<sup>31</sup> carved in four languages: English, Arabic, Spanish, and French.

<sup>29</sup> As one faces the circle of light, the seven spiritual works of mercy adorn the wall behind the pilgrim to the left, leading to Solanus' tomb (pray for the living and the dead, bear wrong patiently, forgive all injuries, comfort the sorrowing, admonish sinners, instruct the uneducated, counsel the doubtful), and the seven corporal works of mercy are on the right, leading to the body of the church (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead).

<sup>30</sup> Minutes of the Solanus Commission of the Province of St. Joseph, 18 July 2001.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 4: 30.



Ill. 6. Francis embracing the crucified Christ (photo: Edward Foley)

If pilgrims continue to the right, beyond the chapel of reconciliation, they encounter two small counseling rooms: private meeting spaces where pilgrims can speak with spiritual directors or other members of the staff to discuss personal matters. This path eventually leads directly into the body of the chapel of the monastery. As this path also veers toward the frontage street (Mt. Elliott), and is close to the former entrance to the monastery and chapel, it was deemed appropriate to provide direct access at the end of this path between the street and the chapel. While we envision pilgrims beginning their local journey through the 'sheep gate', the Solanus Commission realized that many local faithful – as well as staff – need an informal entry through which the frequent visitor or employee can directly access the worship space. Furthermore, this secondary entrance provided added security, as that it allowed access to the worship space without opening the entire Solanus Center to visitors.

If the pilgrim veers to the left – as most do – the corona of light leads to the tomb of Solanus. After Solanus' body was exhumed from the small cemetery behind the monastery in 1987, it was reburied in the Church. The reburial was below the floor level of the church, and a wooden shell marker in the shape of a sarcophagus – etched with the words of Solanus "Blessed Be God in All His Designs", a phrase he often used in his letters – was placed above his body. In reenvisioning the tomb, the Solanus Commission recognized that the body could not nor should not be moved. There was also agreement, however, that the tomb needed to be separated from the chapel. The chapel is a place of worship, where Eucharist is celebrated, where the reserved Eucharist is housed, and where baptisms, funerals and other liturgical rites occur. Given the large number of visitors to Solanus' tomb in the past, and the anticipated larger number in the future, it was necessary to safeguard the worship space, so that participants in worship would not be disturbed by visitors to Solanus' tomb. On the other hand, it was also recognized that the tomb – translated into the chapel in 1987 – needed an intimate connection with the worship space. Solanus had conducted many rituals in the chapel space, including rituals of healing which continue each Wednesday afternoon. Thus, there were times when it was appropriate to link the central worshipping space with the tomb area. If Solanus is ever beatified or canonized, this linkage will be even more important, as there will be days when Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours will be celebrated – liturgies in which Solanus will be invoked as

a member of the 'communion of saints' and a revered intercessor to God through Christ in the Holy Spirit.

The reconciliation of these paradoxical needs resulted in the expansion of the tomb area, and the repositioning of the original wooden sarcophagus in proximity to the body. Given, however, that the rebuilt tomb space was 200 % larger than the original north transept that housed the body, and that symmetrical positioning of the tomb was not deemed feasible in the new space, the current wooden shell sarcophagus is not exactly above the body. The 'tomb area', however, does reside within a few feet of the exhumed and reburied body. The Solanus Commission agreed that this more metaphoric and less literal sarcophagus placement was appropriate in a space more focused on pilgrimage than shrine. The goal here was not to provide typography that was verifiable by modern technology such as global positioning systems (GPs), but to offer a pilgrimage space which allowed visitors to encounter story, artifacts and even the tomb of Solanus without the fixation on the coordinates of the body, which often shrine spaces stress and even exploit.

The center of the tomb space is a slightly raised platform surrounded by a band of gold pewabic tiles. On top of the platform sits the wooden shell sarcophagus described above. The platform and sarcophagus are so positioned that people with physical disabilities, e.g., those in wheel chairs, can get close enough to touch the above ground sarcophagus. This is important as it has become local custom not only to touch the wooden sarcophagus, but also to leave prayer requests on top of the tomb. Pilgrims' needs to come into proximity to the most concrete symbol of Solanus' body could not be ignored.

On the west wall of this tomb space, the original tombstone of Solanus – which marked his grave in the cemetery behind the Monastery of St. Bonaventure – has been embedded in the brick wall. The instinct here was to bring the history of past pilgrimages, and the memory of those untold thousands who journeyed to the original burial spot of Solanus, together with the contemporary pilgrims who visit his new resting place.

The tomb and its expanded transept is separated from the chapel by an elegant set of gates, crafted in bronze and glass. Realized by Rick Findora – the artist who shaped the entrance gates to the creation garden – these delicate doors provide the counterpart to the art marking the sheep gate. While the former symbolically depicted the wonders of creation and the book of Genesis, these gates more delicately evoke the book of the Apoc-

alypse, the city on the hill, and the collaboration of God with human hands in the urban enterprise. Solanus, who ministered and died in an urban environment, was thought to be approving of this transition.

### Conclusions

The Solanus Casey Center was dedicated on 12 December 2002. That ritual signaled the end of a very long design process, extensive demolition complicated by the presence of toxic materials, very complex construction work, and a massive installation of artwork. With the dedication, the Solanus Commission went out of existence and leadership was handed over to a new Director and consultative board. With the opening of the Center, however, a new stage in the Solanus saga began. Pilgrims continue to arrive by the busload to go to the tomb of Solanus, write prayer requests, and place them on the wooden sarcophagus that marks his final resting place. What is radically different, however, is that today pilgrims journey to a tomb now contextualized in a graceful complex, punctuated by rich and unique artistic creations, and surrounded by messages and metaphors of holiness and the invitation for all to follow.

The path from creation garden to Beatitudes, from the museum to the circle of saints is largely an unexpected one. Many pilgrims remark in surprise about the life size sculptors of contemporary women and men, or Solanus communicating to them through computers. Maybe, in their own words, they are hinting at a change in perspective that the space has already evoked in them. They thought they were visitors, and they end up pilgrims. Will this journey to and through the Solanus Casey Center change lives? Will it stir a passion for holiness in ordinary folk? Will it deepen the spirituality of those already on a path of blessedness? Will it elicit more acts of service and charity when pilgrims return to their own cities and homes? Such questions probably cannot be answered in this beginning phase of the Center's history. But such questions are the key for judging the true success or failure of this project, for it is not in the number of visitors, the looming architectural prizes and design awards, or even any contribution this Center might make to the beatification or canonization of Solanus Casey. Rather, this project need be judged by its ability to sustain the vision of holiness and plant the seed of this grace in all who wander its gracious halls. Only then can the project be judged successful, and the mission of the Solanus Center, of Solanus, of the Capuchin friars, and of all believers truly be realized.