



CELEBRATING 50 Years

CAPUCHIN RETREAT CENTER

JULY 15, 2018

# WELCOME



# Retreat Reflect Renew

July 15, 2018

Dear Guests

"History" is a word that carries some weight. We look back on history to note the events and people that have gone before us and which have helped us to be where we are. In the annals of history, fifty years is not a long time. But in the life of one institution, fifty years is significant. Fifty years contain important events, stories, and people.

That is what we celebrate here at Capuchin Retreat in 2018. We have a story of people, both friars and retreatants, who have wanted to develop a place for prayer, a place to which people could come to step away from their daily routines, and to focus on their lives of spirituality and self-reflection.

Capuchin Retreat at Washington has its roots in a house on the St. Clair River, which was used for some years as a retreat center. It became more and more inadequate. And so there was a search for land which ended here in Washington Township. A farmer's field, used for growing food, would become a place which would nourish the personal and spiritual lives of many people.

You can read the personal experience of that time more than 50 years ago, in the words of Fr. Simon Hesse elsewhere in this booklet. Going beyond some facts and details, you get a feel for the personal views of one of the founders of this place. Imagine Fr. Simon looking over a swamp and an empty field. Then look at what we have come to know as this place of peace and prayer.

Through the hard work of Fr. Simon and Fr. Vernon Wagner and many helpers, this land and the building became the setting which would support and enhance the spiritual lives of thousands of people.

Another significant time occurred around the year 2000. Under the guidance of Fr. Gerry Pehler, needed remodeling of the retreat center was accomplished. Also at that time an additional building, St. Crispin Friary, was built to provide a home for friars who would staff the retreat center or reside here in retirement.

As we look back over 50 years of building, of physical change, of preaching and quiet listening, of hours spent in prayer, our response can be echoed by the familiar words of Blessed Solanus Casey: "Blessed be God in all his designs."

Fr. Tom Zelinski,  
Director Capuchin Retreat Center



I am happy to join in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Capuchin Retreat Center.

We often think that when we make a retreat we should spend our time "talking" to God. I've come to understand that it is more important during retreat time to "listen" to God.

The Capuchin Retreat Center is a wonderful and peaceful place to do just that. Thanks to the Capuchins for providing this beautiful space.

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton



*Lord, help me to live this day, quietly, easily.  
To lean upon Thy great strength, trustfully, restfully.  
To wait for the unfolding of Thy will, patiently, serenely.  
To meet others, peacefully, joyously.  
To face tomorrow, confidently, courageously.*

FRANCIS OF ASSISI



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*Thank You!*

# OUR HISTORY

The history of the Capuchin Retreat begins about 1949. Fr. Lawrence Merten, Capuchin, was Spiritual Assistant to the Lay Franciscans at St. Bonaventure in Detroit (the Third Order). He felt the need for a place where the Lay Franciscans could go for spiritual renewal and retreats.

They set about collecting funds and searching for a place. By 1955 they were able to secure the Kuhn Mansion at St. Clair, MI. With great effort and great promotion by Fr. Lawrence and the Lay Franciscans it soon became a thriving year-round Retreat Center. It was called St. Lawrence Retreat House, named after the great Capuchin preacher, St. Lawrence of Brindisi. It was also on the St. Lawrence Waterway.

After some years it proved to be quite inadequate as a Retreat House. There were three or four retreatants to a room and a limited number of bathrooms. Two other houses used were some distance from the main House. In 1964 the Capuchin Superior and his council decided to build a more adequate House. Fr. Simon Hesse, Capuchin, was given the job of raising the money, designing the house and supervising construction.

The Archdiocesan realtor steered us to property owned by Art Zaske, a pious Lutheran. He was pleased that his property would be used for a religious purpose and not a sub-division. The initial plan called for about thirty acres. But Mr. Zaske foresaw the development of the area and suggested ninety acres to ensure needed privacy. He even lowered the price.

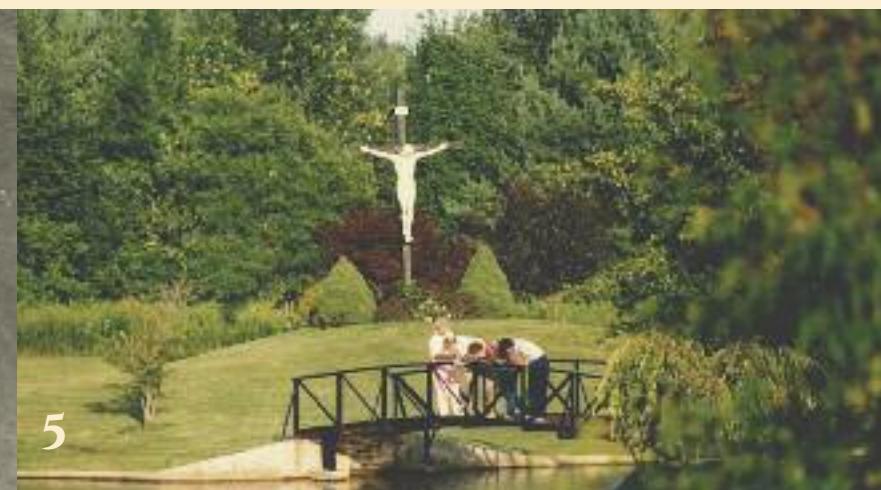


The property consisted of some 35 wooded acres, 20 acre corn field with no trees, 20 acre hay field with no trees and 20 acres pasture

land. The house was built in the corn field. That following year marked the beginning of the tree planting.

The original plan called for seventy five rooms. But in the 1960s there was among the Friars much opposition to building a Retreat House. Retreats were considered a thing of the past and had no future in the "New Church". As a result the decision was made to stay within the initial budget and not leave the Province with a big debt. The Retreat House was built with fifty rooms, with the hope for more rooms at a later date. Incredibly, the cost of construction would increase two hundred percent in the next two years.

The first Retreat was held at the end of June, 1968. Then the retreats that were scheduled for St. Clair were shifted to the new house. A major advance for the new house came in 1973 when Fr. Vernon Wagner, Capuchin, became Retreat Director. Through his efforts the number of retreats and retreatants were more than doubled. For fourteen years, by personal physical work he turned the barren fields into a place of great natural beauty as it is today, a place where one can easily sense the presence of God reflected in the beauty of nature.



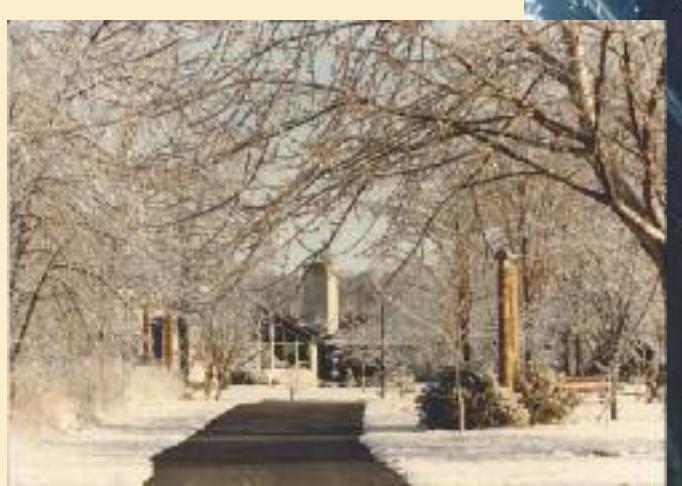


HE has made  
everything  
BEAUTIFUL  
in its own time.  
HE has also  
set eternity in  
the human  
HEART



yet no one can  
fathom what  
GOD has done  
from beginning  
to end.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11



# OUR GROUNDS

It has been said that Fr. Simon Hesse found spiritual comfort here on the grounds of Capuchin Retreat. His love of nature and religious devotion, coupled with years of hard work, have created a park-like expanse around the Capuchin Retreat House in Washington Michigan. It was just a treeless northern Macomb County cornfield, woods, and pastureland when Fr Simon purchased it on behalf of the Capuchin Franciscans over 50 years ago. Since then the 95 acres, which borders Stony Creek Nature Center, has been enhanced while retaining a feeling of natural beauty.

*“Nature is the best place  
to be part of God.”*

beautiful trees, shrubs and plants. Fr. Simon stated “That the landscaping reflects the retreat’s goal: To provide an oasis from stress, a place to reflect.” He felt that the plantings contributed to the remote, peaceful feeling. Often the retreatants are treated to the songs of birds, the gobble of turkeys or the stare of deer, all of which also find a home here.



People who visit the retreat house like to get away from it all, and in the serene silence discover the inner peace of God in their lives.

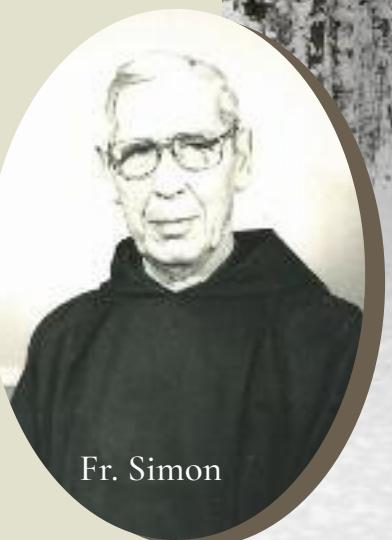
Our retreatants often need time to rediscover or nurture their values and priorities. Fr. Simon's vision for the grounds, allows for the space to experience God in nature and in the depth of our hearts. With the tranquility around here people come and rest. They may walk the 95 acres, filled with deer, birds, or picturesque trees; sit in the gazebo or one of the many benches and absorb the beauty and listen to God whispering through the gentle breeze or the fountain. The grounds are the perfect place to go outside and walk amidst the many paths through the woods and fields to become reconnected to God and yourself. Take a Holy Walk in the Labyrinth carved into the land, be present, silent, walk, listen, wonder, receive God's gifts and then go in peace on your journey.

Come, let the refreshing quiet embrace you like a peace-filled presence that lifts you up and renews your spirit.

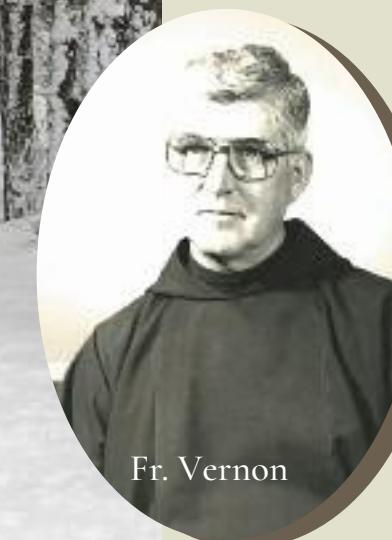




*Our Founders*



Fr. Simon



Fr. Vernon

## PRAYER FOR *Capuchin Retreat*

Gracious and loving God,  
who through the devoted labor of  
Fr. Simon and Fr. Vernon have  
provided a place of solitude and  
prayer for your people, we ask  
your continued blessing on what  
they so nobly began. Continue to  
work in the lives of all who have  
been deeply touched by their  
experience of Capuchin Retreat,  
and continue to bless this place  
and all who have found here a spir-  
itual home. We ask this through  
Christ, our Lord.

*Amen.*



TO EVERY  
THING  
THERE IS A  
*Season*  
AND A  
TIME  
TO EVERY  
PURPOSE  
UNDER  
*Heaven*

Ecclesiastes



# OUR GUESTS

FOR EVERY  
*Season of Life*

Who are the guests who come to Capuchin Retreat? As I consider this question, I am reminded of the time I was moving to a retreat center to become part of the staff. This was 1978. Another priest asked me why I was doing that. Wasn't retreat center ministry mainly about "saving the saved?"

Over the years I have seen more and more what a lack of understanding that question revealed. Yes, we are all saved by Jesus, but along the journey of life, there are many "bumps in the road," for even the most faithful of Christians. And the role of the retreat center is to provide a peaceful

stopping place along that road. Sometimes I think we should, as along the highway, have a sign saying "Rest Stop" at our entrance.

The people who come to Capuchin Retreat are here for a Sabbath rest during their journey. They take time away from their regular routines to be better able to think, pray, and reflect on their journey with God, the journey of their inner selves.

They are men and women who come for our weekend retreats, which we present 24 times a year. They are others who come for one-day or one-evening programs. They are married couples who attend sessions planned especially for them.

These people tell me, often, that they can feel a kind of peace as they turn into our driveway. Rest Stop indeed. And when they leave there are comments about the peace and quiet they have found.

There are others who come to use our building and grounds for their meetings and programs, again seeking a quiet place where they can meet and think and plan and get to know each other.

There are the Catholic bishops of Region 6 who make their annual retreat here.

There are young people of high school age, or of the Agape group, who are early in their life journey, again wanting a place where they can pray and worship and discern what their lives are to be about.

Individuals come to spend private quiet time, to pray, to wrestle with decisions, to be able to talk with a compassionate listener, willing to hear their story. They come to rest. Rest Stop.

Yes, all of these people have been saved by Jesus, but they all need to take time to absorb, to appreciate, to savor the salvation we have in Christ Jesus. These are our guests at Capuchin Retreat.

Fr. Tom Zelinski





*“From the very first time I set foot on the grounds I knew I was in a holy place. I truly feel that Capuchin Retreat is safe haven where people can be heard, and comforted by our Holy Father.*

*All are welcomed - all are loved.”*

LA



*“This place of God brings such peace and joy to me. A true sanctuary for the soul.”*

George



*“I found this beautiful oasis in a time of great personal need. The peacefulness, the wonderful friars, the warm and caring staff are only a few of the benefits I have received. I only hope I can help others as I have been helped.”*

Mary

*“A very small piece of heaven. Nestled in the woods where one can leave themselves behind, and be closer to God and His creation.”*

Michael

*“One of my favorite things to do is pray at the foot of the cross in the woods, treasuring the moment with the birds singing and the wind blowing the leaves in joyous praise of the Creator, who blessed not only this place, but also all those who wander its paths. “The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky proclaims its builder’s craft”. Psalm. 19:1*

LMH

# LOOKING BACK

The following was an article written by Fr. Simon for The Capuchin Retreat News

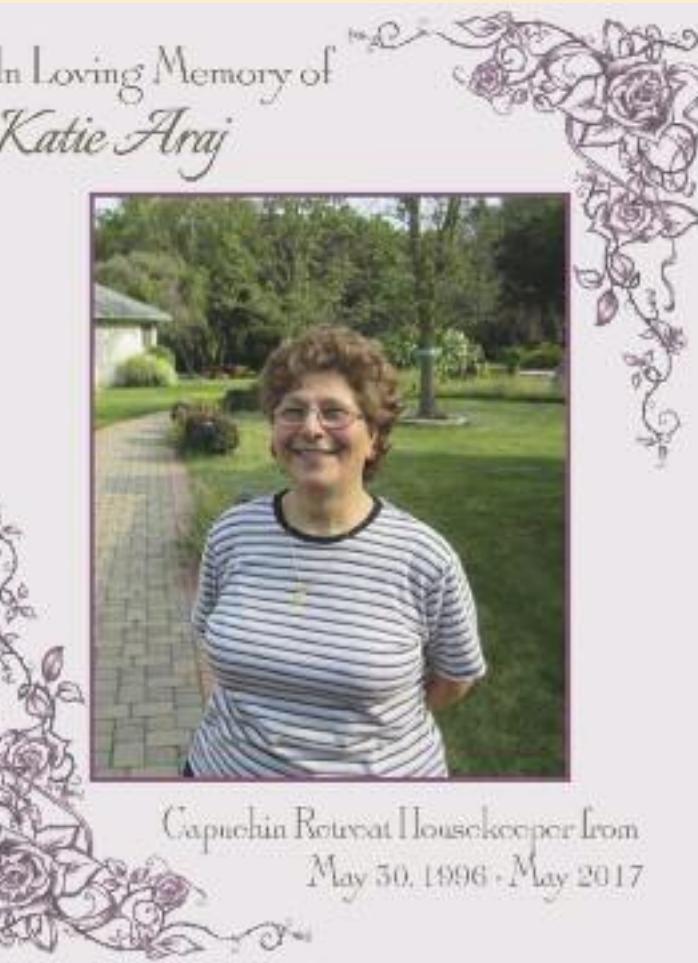
Last June we completed twenty years of retreats here at the Capuchin Retreat. We are now midway through our twenty-first year. There is something special about a twenty-first year. In the lives of people it suggests a successful passage through childhood and teenage, and the attainment of some degree of maturity. The same could apply to a building, especially to a Retreat House. We have gone through those stages.

Many of our present retreatants can recall those days at the Retreat House in St. Clair when we talked about our hope. The new house was conceived! We talked about our dream of a house where each would have a private room, where there would be peace, quiet and solitude, a place where God could talk to us in the beauty of nature.

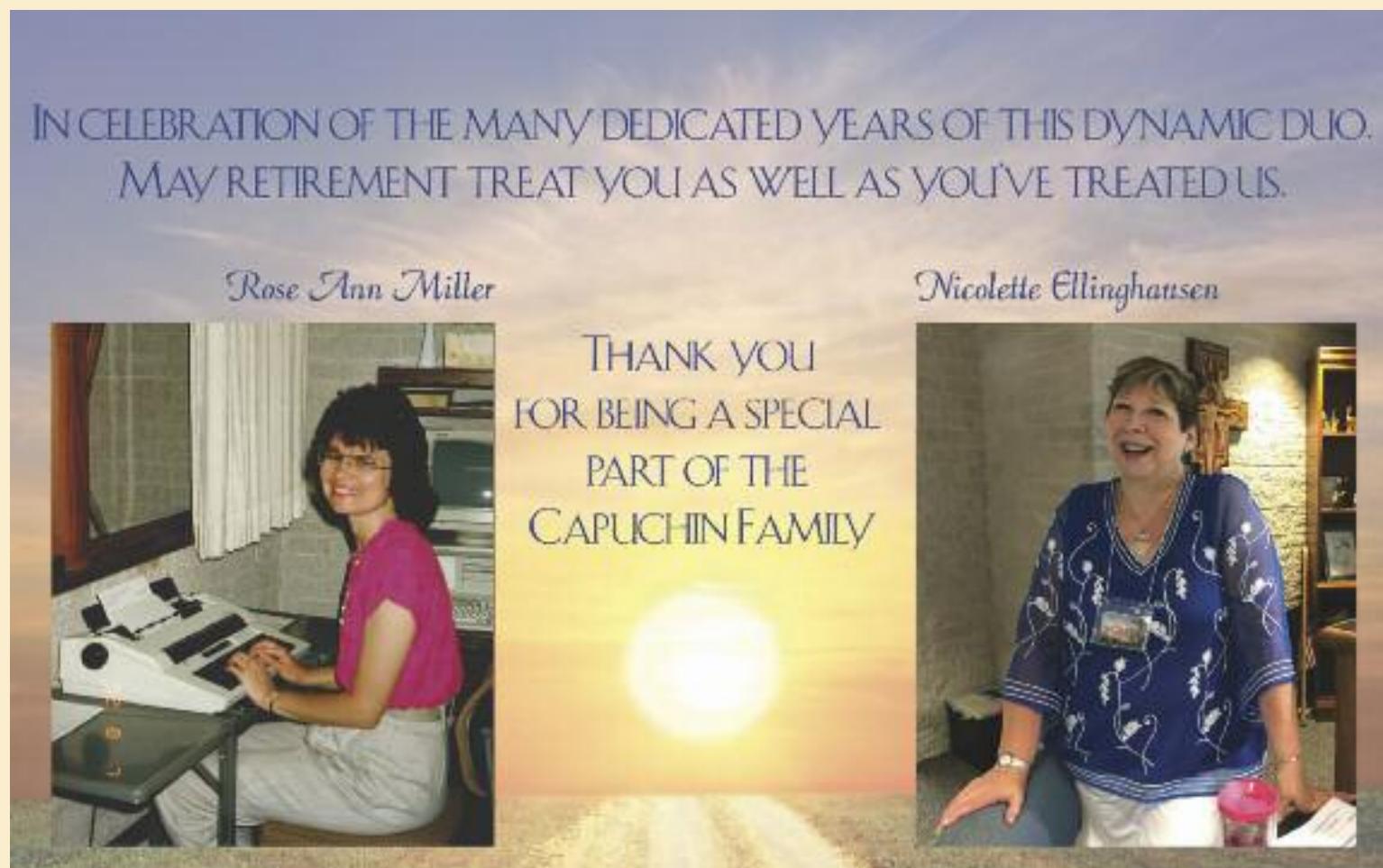
I will always remember that day in May in 1966 when I stood on the top of a little hill in the middle of a corn field in Washington. Behind me was a dense woods shielding the spot from the dust and noise of Mt. Vernon Road. To my left was a swampy pasture land. To my right was a barren hay field. The fences were rows of aging dying trees. Only a wild fantasy could picture our dream house on that knoll.

But in 1968 it was there, still in the middle of the corn field and in its infancy. Retreat began that June. For the next six years we spent our free time cutting down old trees and planting thousands of new ones. The grounds were beginning to mature. The leap into maturity came with the arrival of Father Vernon. He came not only with his expertise as a Retreat Master but also with a Green Thumb, the eye of an artist and a strong back! He turned the corn field into a park. He made the swamp into a fish-filled lake. The hay field became a series of nature walks. His motto might be: "I have only just begun!"

What we can say about the property applies equally to the retreat movement here. There also has been a growing-up process. Each year there has been a steady increase in the number of retreats and retreatants. There is a growing search for a deeper spiritual life and a more intense life of prayer. That is the way it should be. No one leaps suddenly into a mature spiritual life. It is a gradual process. That explains why hundreds of our retreatants have never failed to make their annual retreat for more than twenty years. The great consolation of these years is that steady progress of so many people in their search for God and His love. That too is the reward of all those wonderful people who helped to make the dream a reality.



left to right: Bridgette Shields,  
Sandy McConnell, and Sandy Sequin.



*Special Dedications*

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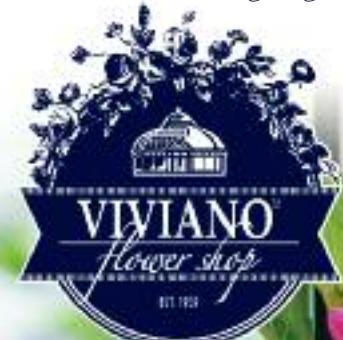
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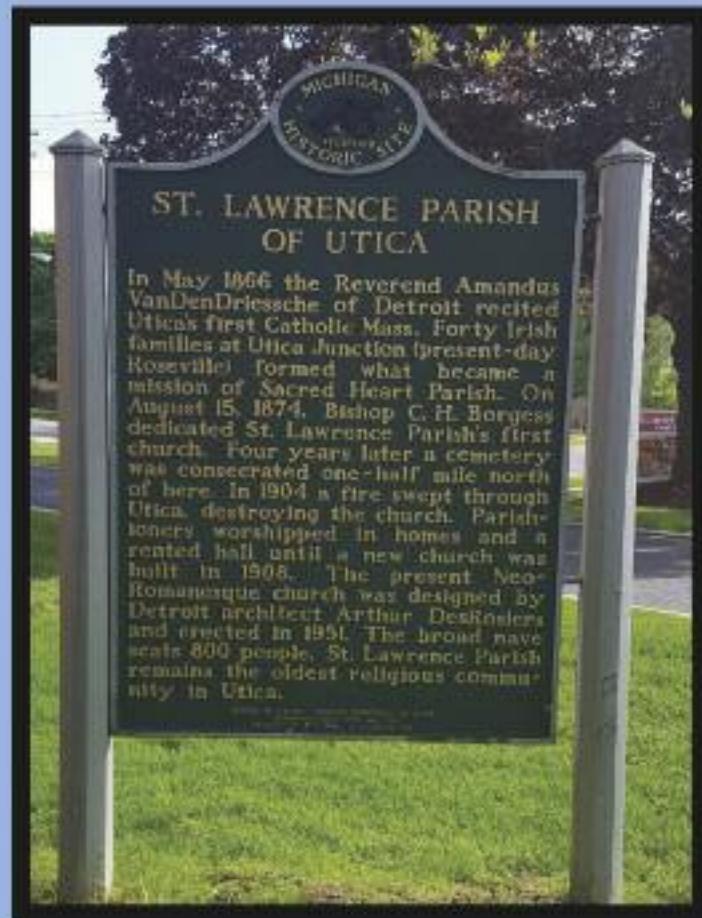
## Widows of Prayer

The Widows of Prayer remember our Founding Spiritual Director, *Fr John Guimond, OFM Cap.* We offer our congratulations to **CAPUCHIN RETREAT** on 50 years of providing blessings to those who need it most.

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

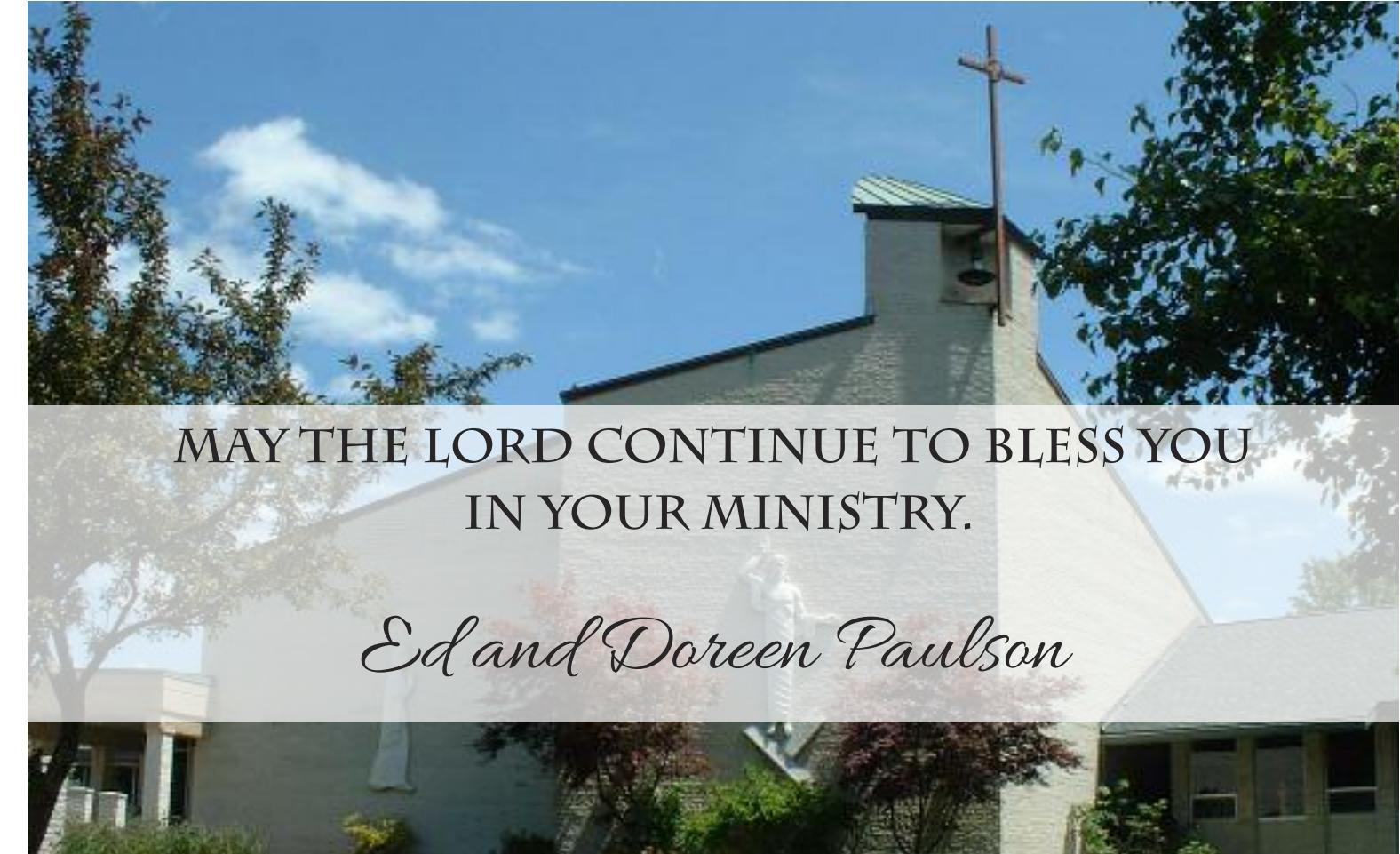
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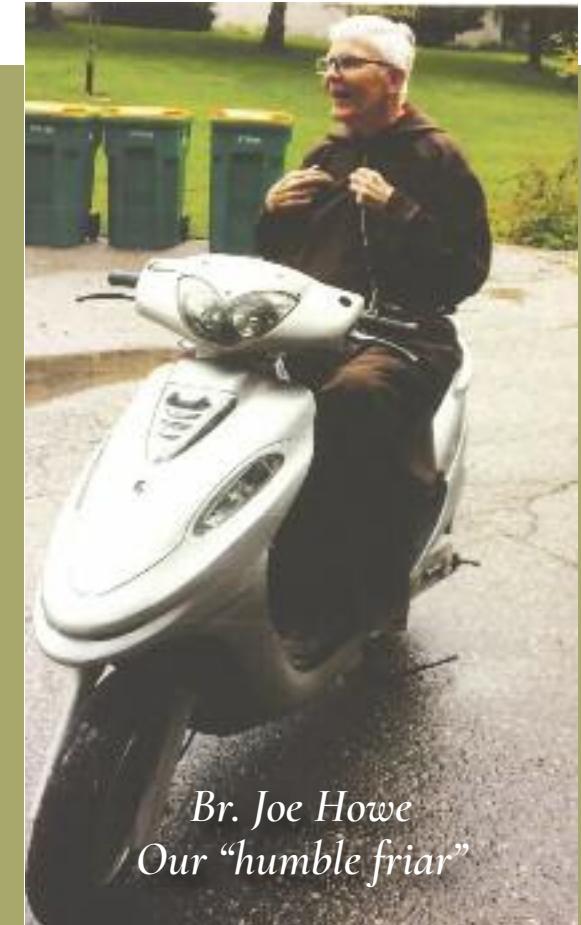


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*We should ever be grateful for and love the vocation  
to which God has called us... what a privilege it is  
to serve God, even in the least capacity!*

Blessed Solanus Casey, OFM Cap.



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***Happy 50th Anniversary to  
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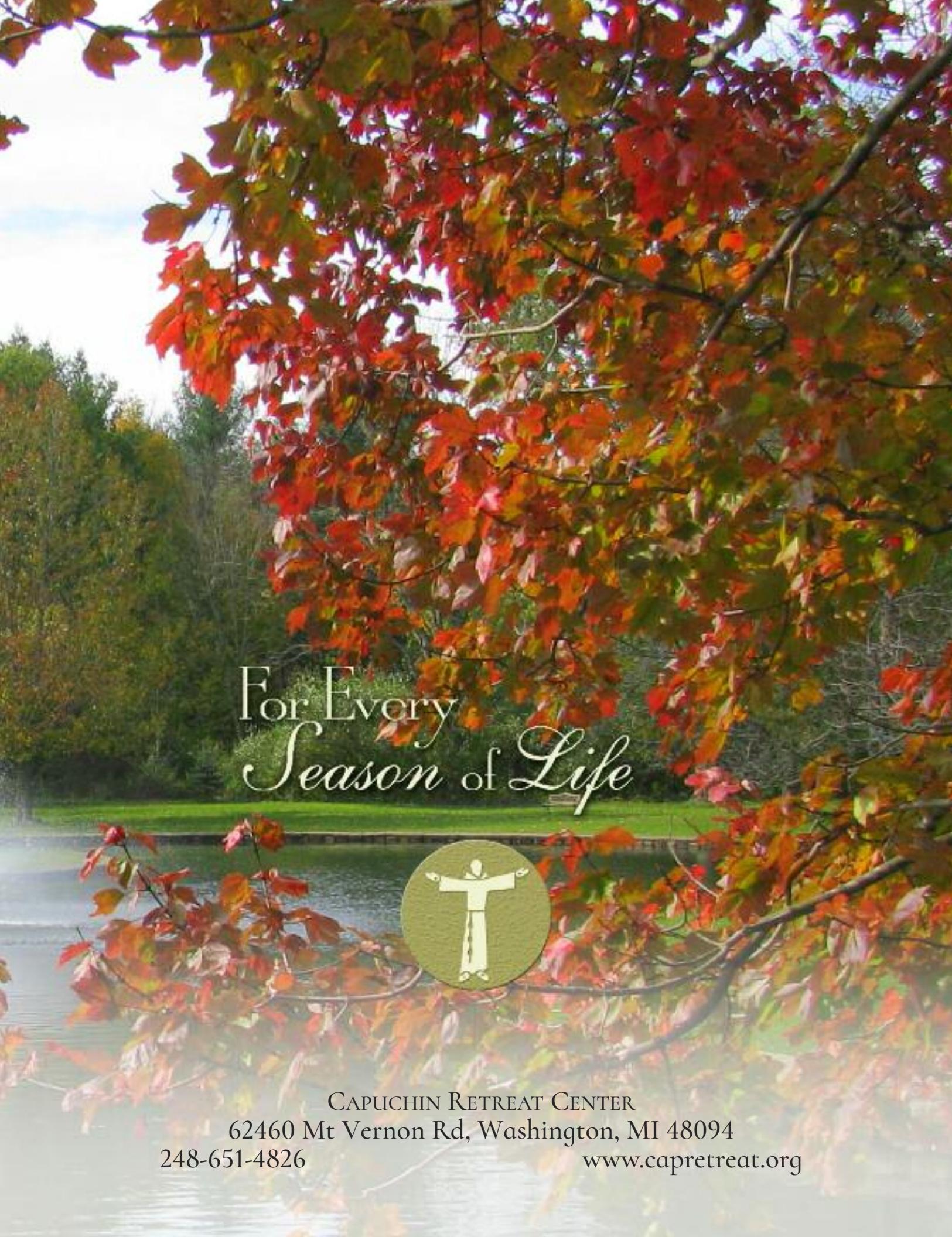
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