

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
**WIN Columnist**

*(This is the last in a three-part series about the people and process behind the hoped-for march to Sainthood for Buffalo's Father Nelson Baker.)*

Always, there was the blood.

In all there were three jars – oh, each the size of maybe a regular mayonnaise container -- unearthed in 1999 during the transferral of Baker's body to the OLV Basilica.

"This is about the amount of fluid in a body that they extract before putting in embalming fluid," Monsignor Robert Wurtz explained. "To me, and I'll just say to me, this shows the tremendous faith that the people had in 1936 that this man was somebody really, really special. And for this reason they were preserving his fluids."

So sure was the modern-day congregation of a miracle, they all but put the first stroke on the chalkboard: one down, one to go. The Vatican had in the past accepted such proof, so Baker was fifty percent of the way home.

"A great number of us figured we have the miracle right here. Five doctors here said it was the same consistency in 1999 as it was in 1936. They had five more doctors over there analyze it and they all said the same thing," Wurtz recalled.

But a not so funny thing happened on the way to Sainthood. The Vatican called an audible. Unbeknownst to the folks in Lackawanna, the rules suddenly had been altered.

"It wasn't until a year ago they said that this could not be considered as THE cure (miracle) that we need for beatification (step two). The reason is that a cure through somebody's intercession must be for other people," OLV's chief executive said. And that's just exactly the very next statement that they made, the theology of sainthood has changed."

Priests are people too. For Wurtz, the first to hear the news, it was heartbreaking.

"Can you imagine someone walking down the street with a child with a balloon on a string and someone running up with a pin and sticking that balloon? That's the best way I can describe it. That was my feeling when I walked out of that office."

Maybe the miracle comes this Christmas, or next year, when OLV celebrates the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution, started as a two-story orphanage in 1854. Maybe it comes from one of the Baker Boys themselves, the few remaining, who are planning a reunion as part of the special milestone.

Wurtz himself has talked to hundreds and hundreds who have passed through there. "They're tight with Father Baker, and with each other. I don't care who you are or where you're from. It's a brotherhood."

If CBS is interested, maybe "CSI: Lackawanna" could join its programming line up. Wurtz continually searches for the tiniest shred that might once again jumpstart the process. For the moment, there are no hot leads.

"I wish there were. I wish there were," he said. "There's nothing that's burning the lines between here and Rome. I still review all the cases, to see if I missed something that I should have looked at the first time."

The answer, from halfway across the world, is always the same, Wurtz added, "miracolo, miracolo, miracolo."

Even though his body was brought to the Basilica four years ago, Baker's likeness has always been part of the magnificent edifice. There, peering over the intersection of South Park and Ridge, is a sculpture of the bespectled Padre of the Poor, children at his feet, an artwork he loathed for the attention it brought him.

Wurtz laughs, but is quick to respond when asked how Father would perceive today's efforts. "I've often wondered that, I've often wondered what he would think." How does he answer the question? "I don't."

There's only one that can. On a timetable of His choosing. For Buffalo's chosen man.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member*

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