



Sacred art

Matt Payovich's art graces Catholic church's chapel

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ST. JOSEPH — It takes a certain amount of faith to be an artist. Matt Payovich knows that well. The 57-year-old St. Joseph native has carved out a career by taking chances with everything from raku-fired clay pieces to painting enamel on tiles to creating complex mosaics for more than 30 years.



PAYOVICH

It's only when talking about his most recent work, however, that Payovich says he feels like he's found his calling. "It's one of those paths that sort of chooses you," Payovich says, standing inside the Sacred Heart Adoration Chapel at the St. Joseph Catholic Church. "As an artist you're always looking for a way to move somebody with your work. That's the whole idea. But I don't think people think along those lines anymore. They buy a piece of work to enhance a room. ... For me there has to be more meaning to it than just decorating somebody's house. I'm not saying I always achieve that, but that's what you want. That's what I tried to do here."

Above Payovich, on the curved wall archway, are two large paintings on



Photos provided / Frank Fekete

St. Joseph artist Matt Payovich created several pieces to adorn the Sacred Heart Adoration Chapel at St. Joseph Catholic Church. The church is having an open house Dec. 13 so members of the public can get a closer look. Top, the altar area features Payovich's paintings and mosaic works. Above, one of two paintings on the archway features three angels gazing toward the altar.

thin oak boards. Each piece has three glowing angels gazing toward the altar in the small chapel adjacent to the church. The paintings are part of myriad religious artworks that Payovich created for the recently transformed chapel, which will have an open house 1-4 p.m. Dec. 13, when the public can view the pieces up close. The event is in conjunction with "Led by the Spirit," Payovich's exhibit in the Heartha Whitlow Gallery of the Box Factory for the Arts on view through Jan. 2, which includes several prints taken from the chapel's permanent works.

"Elaine Harju, and Ali Hanson, who was director here at the time, had heard about what we were doing

at the chapel and decided to come take a look," Payovich says. "That's how the exhibit came about. Most of the work can't be removed from the chapel, but I could do prints of them."

A parishioner of St. Joseph Catholic Church, Payovich was initially approached in 2000 by the Rev. Eugene Sears to do some art for the church. When Msgr. Michael Osborn opened the Adoration Chapel in June 2007, some of those pieces were moved into the space.

"At one point the church had a chapel, but it had been turned into bathrooms," Payovich says. "Msgr.

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Michael Osborn came in and decided to have a chapel for adoration. We gutted where the old chapel was and started to redo it. Some of those art pieces that were in the main body of the church were moved to the chapel, but it was over several years that the chapel acquired the artwork and it sort of all came together in pieces. I felt like it needed to be tied together so it looked like it was all meant to be in there together.”

Two of the large pieces that moved into the chapel were Payovich’s enamel on tile works that now flank the altar. One depicts Joseph with Jesus as a young boy. The other

shows the holy family with the Virgin Mary clutching a baby Jesus as Joseph looks on.

“The pieces are very large and the chapel is very small so having big pieces in there kind of engulfs the space,” Payovich says. “I felt they needed to look like they belonged there and we had the opportunity to take our time to make it look like it was all put together at once.”

Payovich began by using the same color palettes of his previous work. He enlisted fellow parishioners to be live models and was conscious of the chapel’s architectural features such as the stained glass windows.

“As an artist you do want to be expressive in your own way,” Payovich says. “Doing this work you’re

also thinking of the work that is already in the church itself, which is usually this international Gothic style. It has to correspond with that. The stained glass windows helped dictate the style, too. But I think there’s a way to do it where there’s a fusion of the old and the new.”

Payovich says he had his “Michelangelo moment” painting a scene of angels directly on the wall surrounding another tile piece of Jesus above three stained glass windows. He created an elaborate mosaic of peacocks directly on the altar itself and inserted sacred heart imagery in the border.

“I wanted to keep it warm and ethereal, while keeping matching colors and matching shades,” he says, crediting Svlvia

Shutts and Mary Dudding for doing the wall finishes and the border itself, and Ned Wollenslegel for the woodwork from framing his pieces to refinishing the pews. “... It was really a joint effort to get the chapel to the condition it is.”

Since the chapel is what’s known as a perpetual adoration chapel, meaning someone is praying there every hour day and night, Payovich knows that he will have a constant audience for his work – work that he hopes to have a chance to do again.

“It’s the kind of work that I had been wanting to do,” Payovich says. “It’s something I hope speaks not just to the mind, but to the heart.”

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