Letter from the President - Tom Heitz

Every successful nonprofit is dependent upon the generosity of donors and the involvement of volunteers. The Saint Francis Sculpture Garden has been blessed with both. And never has that been more evident than during the past year.

Max and Jan Gibbs have been involved in the development of the Garden for many, many years. Though Jan is now crossed over, the couple has been involved through leadership, donations, and volunteerism. Jan had always had a love for the outdoors, for the beauty of nature, and for the serenity of a natural setting. So, it was fitting that Max built on that love this past year.

The leadership of the Garden had been working for years to secure the funding necessary to create and install the most significant sculpture of Saint Francis. This nearly life-size depiction of Francis will be the centerpiece for the lookout on the bridge that spans the natural creek. Thankfully, Max has generously provided the final funding needed to make this dream a reality.

Additionally, Max has provided the support necessary to have a comprehensive and exhaustive study done of the Garden to determine what should be done with the plant life currently existing or to be added to beautify our woodland treasure. This plan (which is discussed further in the newsletter) not only gives the Garden a direction to pursue regarding plants, but it has also given us a strategic plan to build the endowment for the future maintenance of the Garden.

Tom Heitz

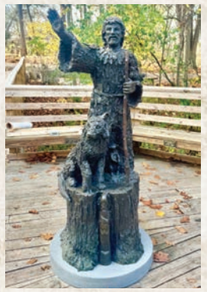


We are so thankful for our "Garden" angels: Max and Jan Gibbs!

Saint Francis Sculpture Garden
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Check out the newest addition to the Garden installed on November 7th.



It is the most significant piece in size and meaning. "Francis: God's Channel of Peace" on the bridge.

Saint Francis Sculpture Garden

VISIT SFSG AT 2023 FULTON STREET EAST, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

NEWSLETTER - November 2026

SFSG LOCATION: 2023 FULTON ST EAST, GRAND RAPIDS
MAILING ADDRESS: PO BOX 140761, GRAND RAPIDS MI 49514
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Our Mission Statement

Saint Francis Sculpture Garden is a Michigan-based not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting peace through artistic endeavors in the spirit of St. Francis. Although inspired by St. Francis, SFSG is a non-denominational organization and respects all faiths and spirituality and is open to all who visit.

A year-in-review message from Facilitator - Mic Carlson

The year 2026 has been an exciting and extraordinary one for the St. Francis Sculpture Garden. This year marked the first time in 800 years that the remains of Francis were available for the public to view. My wife Susan and I were blessed to be able to attend this exposition in Assisi, Italy. It was an emotional time for all of us on the pilgrimage, and we were excited to bring that energy back to the Garden to share with the Grand Rapids community.

As we approach the final development of the sculpture sites (only two more to fund and install), we are turning our attention to the maintenance and preservation of our natural surroundings. It has been a fabulously productive year of working within the Dominican Sisters Ecological Master Plan for the Marywood campus. Thanks to our combined efforts, community volunteers (especially the good folks from Holy Family Catholic Church in Sparta) have continued to help with the removal of invasive species, such as Japanese honeysuckle and buckthorn. We have also been working with a talented horticulturalist for future plantings and vegetation control (see article in this newsletter). Add to all of that, we were also able to invest in refreshing the pathways with the chips and dust material that helps maintain our barrier-free walking paths.

Since we are a "free" Garden for all, fundraising continues to be a necessary strategic action. Again this year, we were showered with both volunteerism and donations. We received a significant donation to finalize the funding for a sculpture of Saint Francis located on the bridge and installed in November, as well as having a very successful Fools' Fest. Likewise, this year's golf outing was another success. This year's event fell on the 25th anniversary of 9/11. As part of our opening ceremonies, we held a memorial for the thousands who were lost in that terrorist attack, as well as having a soul-lifting rendition of "Amazing Grace" played by a bagpiper. All carts headed for the course at precisely 9:11 a.m. It was both an emotional and uplifting day of community for the Garden!

On a final note, we had a donation made for the installation of a few signs within the Garden to remind visitors of our need for future support for the maintenance of the Garden. These signs have QR codes to make the giving that much easier.

All in all, a most productive year for our Saint Francis Sculpture Garden!

Pace bene!!

Mic









The Future

In summer 2026, the Board of the St. Francis Sculpture Garden contracted with Joe Sulak of More Trees & Plants! LLC to perform a comprehensive assessment of and create a 3–5-year planting plan for all the vegetative components of the Sculpture Garden. The plan has 3 main components:

1 OBSERVATIONS



Vegetative inventory of each sculpture site

2 RECOMMENDATIONS



Tasks, plantings, additional site work and costs

3 MAINTENANCE PROTOCOL



Regular mulching, planting, weeding, storm debris response, leaf removal, etc.

Each site is listed in the adjacent grid by name, with recommendations, initial costs associated with the recommendations, annual maintenance costs, and the necessary endowed fund to cover the annual maintenance cost. The intent is to make it easier to coordinate work by priority and use individual site totals as a guide for potential fundraising opportunities.









The horticultural plan will give leadership a great deal of direction in the maintenance of the Garden well into the future. However, it also becomes a strategic fundraising plan to ensure the maintenance and beauty that exist now. As a priority, leadership will address the total cost of the immediate recommendations. As noted in the plan, this requires a little more than $40,000 in the near term—perhaps one or two years. Then, the ensuing annual goal will be to ensure that the annual maintenance costs for each site are realized. Additionally, the annual costs associated with mulching the Garden and refurbishing the pathways will be addressed.

As a continuing strategy, leadership will be seeking donors who might establish a site-specific endowed fund. Conservatively, these funds will annually generate the necessary cost associated with the annual maintenance of the site. When fully funded with both restricted and unrestricted funds at a level of approximately $300,000, the Garden's future will be guaranteed in perpetuity!

Saint Francis Sculpture Garden Site-Specific Endowment Plan - 2026

What each site needs now, what it costs to do, what annual maintenance costs, and the endowment that would fund that maintenance in perpetuity.

	INITIAL COST	ANNUAL COST	ENDOWMENT GOAL
	$41,500	**$8,500**	**$170,000**

SITE #	GARDEN SITE	IMMEDIATE RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL	ANNUAL	ENDOWMENT
–	**Plaza Gazebo Area and Plaza Hill**	Regular weeding; monitor Boxwood and remove dead sections; plantings including Wild Petunia, Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod	$500	$500	$10,000
1	**Francis Renounces His Earthly Father**	Background shrub planting; native perennials including Wild Petunia, Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod, Woodland Sunflower	$2,000	$400	$8,000
2	**Immense Joy & Conversion at San Damiano**	Regular weeding; plantings including Ostrich Fern, Wood Violet, Variegated Hosta, Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod	$500	$200	$4,000
3	**Francis on the Road**	Weeding; replace Buckthorn with Elderberry; treat Ash for EAB; plantings including Bloodroot, Spikenard, Spicebush	$800	$250	$5,000
4	**Francis and Brother Wolf**	Invasive removal (top priority); mulching; plantings including Spicebush, Dogwood, Butterfly Weed, Little Bluestem	$2,000	$300	$6,000
5	**Francis Daydreaming**	Redefine edging; shade-tolerant shrubs and perennials including Viburnum, Spicebush, Bloodroot, Wild Ginger	$1,350	$350	$7,000
6	**Francis and Brother Leone**	Reset edging; weeding; ferns and edge plantings including Ostrich Fern, Sensitive Fern, Penn Sedge, Big-Leaf Aster	$1,350	$350	$7,000
7	**God's Beggar**	Treat Ash for EAB; remove Buckthorn and Honeysuckle; weeding; add ferns, Bunchberry and shade-tolerant perennials	$950	$200	$4,000
8	**Preaching at the Temple of Minerva**	Remove invasives and dead tree; weeding; Ash treatment; plantings including Goldenrod, Viburnum, Spicebush	$1,050	$200	$4,000
9	**Francis Preaching to the Birds**	Shade-tolerant plantings for empty bed including Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod, Columbine, Virginia Wild Rye, Bloodroot	$400	$200	$4,000
10	**Big Francis and the Bird**	Remove Honeysuckle root clumps; plant entrance garden; shrubs including Paw Paw, Viburnum, Elderberry, Spicebush	$950	$100	$2,000
11	**Francis and Brother Bernardo in Devout Prayer**	Remove Honeysuckle clumps; re-edge and replant Giving Tree bed; border shrubs including Viburnum, Dogwood	$2,000	$300	$6,000
12	**Francis and Brother Leper**	Plant among rocks (Butterfly Weed); prune rather than remove Norway Maple; new trees; continue invasive removal	$1,300	$300	$6,000
13	**Francis and Clare**	Ash soil-drench treatment; invasive removal; weeding; repeat Ostrich Fern planting at entrance; add native grasses	$550	$200	$4,000
14	**Francis with Great Joy**	Treat/remove Ash; remove Honeysuckle clumps and Mulberry; plantings including Elderberry, Redbud, Cardinal Flower	$2,500	$400	$8,000
15	**Bridge Centerpiece - Francis; Gods Channel of Peace**	Bench upkeep and Bronze donor Recognition	$2,000	$400	$8,000
16	**Francis meets Pope Innocent III**	Minor weeding; tall plantings between statue and bridge (Woodland Sunflower, Wild Rye); sponsored potted plants	$400	$100	$2,000
17	**Francis and Clare in God's Hands**	Weeding; plant open area and behind tablets with Paw Paw, Goldenrod, Viburnum, Dogwood; sponsored pots	$1,000	$200	$4,000
18	**Jesus with Children**	Weeding; encourage Paw Paw saplings; understory border plantings including Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod, Big-Leaf Aster	$600	$200	$4,000
19	**Sculpture Education and Display**	Weeding; plant White Pine, Viburnum and Elderberry; Paw Paw; woodland natives including Goldenrod, Spikenard	$2,500	$400	$8,000
20	**Sculpture Education and Display**	Viburnum hedgerow, White Pine and Sugar Maple backdrop, memorial benches	$5,000	$500	$10,000
21	**The Sorrows of Francis**	Elderberry, Dogwood and Viburnum behind wall, phasing out Honeysuckle; donor annual planters on entrance walls	$3,000	$350	$7,000
22	**Francis Meeting Sultan and His Camel**	Herbaceous woodland natives including Blue-Stemmed Goldenrod, Spikenard, Ostrich Fern, Wild Ginger, Wood Violet	$800	$400	$8,000
23	**The Meeting of Francis and Dominic**	Transplant Redbud seedlings along path; Viburnum, Dogwood, Elderberry screening; woodland natives on entrance trail	$2,300	$400	$8,000
24	**Francis and Brother Fire**	Treat Poison Ivy; remove dead Ash; weeding; Elderberry border; native forbs including Wild Bergamot and Coneflowers	$2,000	$200	$4,000
25	**Francis Receiving Stigmata**	Continue Hosta bed; screen road with Elderberry, Viburnum, Dogwood between Spruce; define prairie boundary; weeding	$600	$400	$8,000
26	**Francis Kneeling in Prayer**	Weeding; shade shrubs between Sites 8 and 15 (Viburnum, Dogwood); perennials including Spikenard, Spring Ephemerals	$400	$200	$4,000
27	**Canticle of Brother Sun**	Treat Poison Ivy; remove dead Ash and shrubs; clear stairs; plantings including Arrowwood Viburnum, Aster, Penn Sedge	$1,400	$200	$4,000
28	**The Grotto – Francis Embraces Sister Death**	Weed all beds; remove dying Crabapple; native forbs including Tall Coreopsis, Wild Bergamot, Prairie Smoke, Coneflower	$1,300	$300	$6,000
	Totals for the 29 sites with costs assigned		**$41,500**	**$8,500**	**$170,000**