**MEDIA INVITATION**

­­

Communication & Mission Promotion

**Jennifer Schack**

Director of Media Relations

Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Office | 513.263.6618

Cell | 859.512.5626

jschack@CatholicAOC.org

**W H O** | Fr. Kenneth Schnipke, C.PP.S., parishioners, community firemen and first responders

**W H A T** |Firemen & First Responders Thank You event

**W H E N** |Sunday, July 27, 2025, 1:30 P.M. through 3:30 P.M.

**W H E R E** |St. John the Baptist Church, Maria Stein

 Prayer Service: South parking lot on SR 119

 Social Gathering following Prayer Service: Knights of St. John Hall,

 8608 St. Rt. 119, Maria Stein, Ohio 45860

Release Date: July 28, 2025

**Community Gathered to Honor First Responders After Church Fire**

Christ Our Light Family of Parishes gathered on Sunday for a **"Firefighters & First Responders Thank You"** event, honoring those who helped during the recent fire at St. John the Baptist Church. Originally planned as an outdoor prayer service across the street from the damaged church, heavy rain and storms moved the event indoors. More than 300 people gathered at the **Knights of St. John Hall,** located just east of the church.

The prayer service included remarks from **Fr. Kenneth Schnipke, C.PP.S.,** pastor of Christ Our Light Family of Parishes, which includes St. John the Baptist Parish. A letter from **Archbishop Robert G. Casey** was also read in his unexpected absence. Community members who have supported the parish throughout the past two months were publicly recognized.

The event was especially intended to thank the firefighters who worked tirelessly to save the structure and sacred items. **Around two dozen firefighters** were in attendance, along with **about ten first responders** who were also honored for their dedicated service. In addition FIRST ONSITE who is overseeing the recovery efforts, were also thanked for their support that began the evening of the fire.

On display at the event were several sacred items recovered from the church remains, including the **tabernacle, ciborium, candlesticks,** and the **processional cross.**

Remarks given by **Fr. Kenneth Schnipke, C.PP.S. on July 27 at Thank You Event:**

“We gather here today in prayer and thanks in front of our beloved St. John the Baptist Church. It has been hollowed out by fire, and yet it still remains hallowed by faith, revered and honored as a sacred place in our lives. It may be empty inside, but our hearts and our lives are not. There are so many thoughts and memories that flood our minds: a baptism into new life; receiving healing and reconciliation; being gathered as family, fed and nurtured by the very Body and Blood of Jesus; being emboldened by the gift of the Holy Spirit; celebrating our vocation in life; mourning loss, sadness and death that leads to eternal life.

In the gospel, Jesus tells us to “ask and you will receive; seek and you fill find; knock and the door will be opened to you.” We did ask the afternoon of Thursday, May 29th and people came running to help. Fire fighters came from all over the area bringing fire trucks and tankers, hoses and helmets, courage and wisdom, strength and compassion giving of themselves so generously and freely to help and protect others. I had the opportunity to meet and talk with many of the firemen from Chickasaw, Osgood, Minster, New Bremen and so many other places. It’s obvious that they are devoted to helping anyone who asks. First responders and other volunteers came quickly as well, securing access, directing traffic and caring for the needs of fire fighters and others with water, food and fraternal support. One of the first calls I received was from Archbishop Casey assuring us of his prayers and support, and his was followed by many others from the Archdiocese, including risk management, property management, finance, liturgy and media relations all helping us deal with the fire at hand and all the follow up to come. By evening FIRST ONSITE, a company specializing in church restoration after fires and other tragic events was onsite. They began as a family business that became part of a national business. That means they understand family and community, while having access to national assets. We are a self-sufficient community in many ways, but we also know the magnitude of the St. John fire means that we need to heed the words of Jesus, “ask and you will receive.”

Our primary goal of this prayer service and gathering is to thank the firemen, first responders, Archdiocese of Cincinnati, FIRST ONSITE and many other professionals who have responded to our ask for help. They are standing among us and next to us so I would like to first acknowledge who they are, then thank them and then offer a blessing for them. So first I would ask Chief Joe Hartings from Chickasaw to come up on stage and all the firemen, first responders, Archdiocese of Cincinnati and FIRST ONSITE personnel to raise your hands. And now, I ask all of us to take a moment to look around, acknowledge and personally thank those near you as we now offer them all a round of applause.

On behalf of all the St. John the Baptist parishioners, I would like to offer a prayer of blessing upon our firemen and first responders. As I do so, I invite you to join me extending your hand in blessing as well.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of mercy,

who through your Son gave us a marvelous example of charity

and the great commandment of love for one another.

Send down your blessings on these firemen and first responders,

who so generously devote themselves to helping and protecting others.

Grant them courage when they are afraid,

wisdom when they must make quick decisions,

strength when they are weary,

and compassion in all their work.

When they are called to aid both friend and stranger,

let them faithfully serve you in their neighbor.

Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

A St. John Building Committee has been formed. The initial focus of the committee will be to work with the Archdiocese, FIRST ONSITE, insurance adjusters, architects and others to understand the possible future options for St. John Church, explain those options to the St. John parishioners in town hall meetings, and help parishioners discern and decide the best path forward through consensus building. There are multiple scenarios that could happen from what we know at this time. The church could be rebuilt as it was. Parts of the church could be reused with new parts built on. The remaining structure could be raised and a new church built. The viability of each of these options may change as insurance settlement is determined, the integrity of the remaining structure is assessed and as the future needs of St. John’s are discerned.

On August 15, 1887, our ancestors in faith decided to build our current church. As a parish family, they considered the past, the previous church that had served them well for nearly 40 years. They considered the present and their growing community, and they looked to the future, not merely 10 or 15 years ahead, but a church that would provide for their needs for the next 100+ years. Now it is our time to discern the future of St. John the Baptist Church that will serve not only our needs today, but also for generations to come.

We know it is important to ask, to seek and to knock, trusting how much more our Father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. May God bless and guide us as we discern the future of St. John the Baptist Church.”

Images from event can be found here: [**https://mrosephotographydesign.shootproof.com/gallery/st-johns-prayer-service/**](https://mrosephotographydesign.shootproof.com/gallery/st-johns-prayer-service/)

Password to access:stjohns529

Members of the media please credit *St. John the Baptist Parish* for images provided.

For updates on the parish’s recovery efforts, please visit:

**https://www.marioncatholiccommunity.org/st-john-recovery-blog**

*The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Cincinnati is the 45th largest Catholic diocese in the country, with nearly 440,000 Catholics, and has the fifth largest Catholic school system in terms of enrollment with more than 41,000 students. The 19-county territory includes 199 canonical parishes organized into 57 Families of Parishes, and 111 Catholic primary and secondary schools.*