

2015 WMOF Inspirational Icon: The Holy Family By Neilson Carlin

“What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race.” – John 1:4

As planets find perfect balance and harmony revolving around the sun, so do we find perfect order when we establish Christ at the center of our families. His light illuminates our hearts and minds, and our interactions with others. Consequently, the piece was designed to focus the viewer on the centrality of Christ in the image, and remind us of the necessity of his role as the focal point of our lives.

From front to back, the figures have been intentionally layered to indicate the proximity of their relationship to Christ. In the extreme foreground, practically walking out of the canvas, stands the infant, his eyes fixed firmly on the viewer, extending a sign of blessing situated in the exact center of the painting. Next to him, the Blessed Mother, with a gaze slightly beyond her son as she looks toward his passion, fully aware of the trial yet to begin for her family for the sake of all families. Just behind stands St. Joseph, gently resting a loving and protective hand on his wife; his hand completes the chain of connection that begins with Christ’s hand, which rests gently on his mother’s. Behind all stand Mary’s mother and father, SS. Ann and Joachim. They, along with Mary and Joseph, all turn in the direction of Christ. With pensive faces, their joy comes not from the removal of suffering with the coming of Our Lord, but from a firm and steady reliance on Christ as their morning star, guiding them through the storms of life.



Surrounding the figures is an architectural framework loosely mimicking the ciborium over the altar at the Cathedral Basilica of SS. Peter & Paul in Philadelphia. This framework contains elements very specific to the time and place of the event for which the piece was commissioned. On the upper left is a depiction of the coat-of-arms of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia where the 2015 World Meeting of Families will convene. On the upper right is the coat-of-arms of His Holiness, Pope Francis, under whose pontifical aegis the meeting will be guided. On the bottom, a reminder of the year in which the World Meeting of Families will be celebrated. Situated all around are white lilies, a reminder of the purity of the Holy Mother.

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