

## Our Lady of Victory Basilica – Father Baker Museum

Organized chronologically, this 7,800 square foot museum is dedicated to the life, work and legacy of Father Nelson Baker, a candidate for canonization by the Roman Catholic Church.

The museum is located in Our Lady of Victory Basilica, a magnificent structure inspired by Father Baker and completed in 1925.



## A Call to Civic Duty

In June of 1863, General Robert E. Lee and his army swept into southern Pennsylvania. Rumors spread throughout Buffalo that the Confederate troops were on the way. New York State called for 20,000 new militia to head to the front lines. Nelson Baker was one of them.

### Deadly Encounters

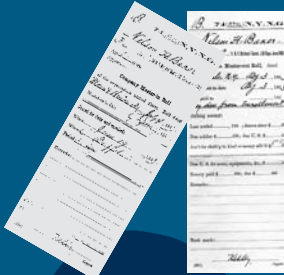
Young Nelson was just 21 years old when he signed up to help fight in the Civil War. He joined the 74th Regiment of the New York State militia. On July 4, 1863, he reported for duty in Mount Union, Pennsylvania. Within hours, the young private was joining tens of thousands of Union Army soldiers for the Battle of Gettysburg.

After finishing their mission in Pennsylvania, the surviving members of his troop were immediately sent to New York City. Deadly riots had broken out across the city. Angry mobs protesting the draft swept through the city, burning, stealing and killing.

After successfully completing the grim mission, Private Baker's unit returned home to Buffalo. The required 30 days of active duty had expired. While not injured, no one could know what toll was taken on Nelson's mind and spirit.



*During overnight guard duty, Nelson heard rustling in a wooded area. Nearby brush cleared and a badly-burnt Confederate soldier fell to the ground. When he was sure the wounded rebel was alone, Private Baker helped him to a safe place. Nelson's act of mercy for someone in need would be repeated many times throughout his life.*



## A Time of Transition

With the encouragement of his friend Father Hines, Nelson Baker felt more confident about changing his life in order to help others. But a final decision would not come easily.

### Reaching a Crossroads

Nelson's mother was overjoyed at the news of her son's desire to enter the seminary but his father and his business partner were not. Still filled with anxiety and doubt, Nelson committed one more year to the business while beginning priestly studies at night.

In order to reflect on the crossroads in his life, Nelson took a prayer-filled trip on a steamer ship along the Great Lakes. Upon his return to Buffalo, Nelson informed those close to him that his decision was made – he was going to become a priest.

### The Seminary

On September 2, 1869, at the age of 27, Nelson Baker entered Our Lady of the Angels Seminary in Niagara Falls. Although older than most students, he participated in every aspect of seminary life.



Very early on, Nelson earned impressive grades through hard study and was respected for being gracious and friendly. Younger students quickly recognized Nelson's leadership ability and he was named an officer for several college clubs and associations. Possessing a fine singing voice and the ability to entertain a crowd, he took part in theatre productions and debates, as well as athletics.

But what mattered most to Nelson was his ability to develop his spiritual life. He set rules of strict self-discipline, praying, fasting, self-denial and humility.

### A Date with Destiny

In 1874, Nelson Baker read about the first American pilgrimage to the famous churches of Europe. For Nelson, the journey would be a trip of thanksgiving for his calling to the priesthood and the many blessings in his life.

The pilgrims had the chance to visit holy places throughout France and Italy. The highlight for many was the personal visit with Pope Pius IX. For Nelson, however, it was the visit to the shrine of Our Lady of Victory in Paris. This small church made a lasting impact on his life and priesthood.



### Nelson Baker Becomes a Priest

After returning from Europe, Nelson was back at work at the seminary quickly fulfilling his requirements. On March 19, 1876, at the age of 34, Nelson Henry Baker was ordained a priest. Much to his surprise, his first assignment was to help his old friend Father Hines at the Limestone Hill Institutions.

## Priesthood

## Baptism by Fire



Much had changed at the Limestone Hill Institutions while Father Baker was away at the seminary. The parish was expanding rapidly, and the charitable programs had a constant stream of new arrivals along with mounting debt. But help was on the way.

### Taking a Toll

Father Hines shared with his new assistant the bleak financial picture at the institutions. Every day was a struggle to make ends meet and the stress showed on Father Hines' face.

For five years, Father Baker worked hard to try to turn things around, yet the debt continued to increase. Convinced the institutions were doomed to fail, Father Baker requested a transfer. He was sent to St. Mary's Parish in Corning, New York.

### Called Back Home

In 1882, just shy of a year in Corning, Father Baker was called back to Buffalo. At age 40, and after only six short years as a priest, he was named superintendent of the Limestone Hill Institutions to relieve Father Hines.

Father Baker did not feel qualified to fill the position. Praying to Our Lady of Victory for guidance, he set out to tackle the enormous challenges he faced.

### Many Helping Hands

The Sisters of St. Joseph were a fixture at the institutions almost from their establishment, overseeing the orphanage and the school. For the boys at Limestone Hill, the Sisters worked hard by harvesting, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, mending, teaching and mothering.

The Brothers of the Holy Infancy oversaw the wayward boys who resided in St. John's Protectors. After time in the classroom each day, the Brothers instructed the boys in various skills at the trade school.



The Sisters of St. Joseph and the Brothers of the Holy Infancy made great sacrifices for the boys. Their work was integral to the day-to-day operations and, over time, their roles evolved as programs expanded or changed. Father Baker quickly learned that the institutions could not survive without their dedication.

