

A CALLING IN COLOR

Local artist using God-given talents to support the Catholic Foundation



Austin Burke works on his painting of the Cathedral of Saint Peter in his Archbald home on Jan. 6, 2026. (Photo/Eric Deabill)

ARCBALD — From the window of the room where Austin Burke paints, he can see the spire of Saint Thomas Aquinas Church in Archbald, his home parish and spiritual anchor.

The view is not lost on him as he spends many mornings carefully sketching, mixing colors, and patiently bringing to life some of the most sacred and iconic church buildings across the Diocese of Scranton — one brushstroke at a time.

For nearly the past year, Burke has been quietly undertaking a remarkable act of stewardship.

The retired community leader has committed himself to painting Catholic churches throughout the Diocese, donating every completed work to benefit the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton.

More than a dozen churches have already been captured on canvas, representing communities from Dunmore, Stroudsburg, Williamsport, Wilkes-Barre to

Scranton, with more to come.

"I feel blessed. I really do," Burke said. "God's given me some talent, given me the health to go through with it, given me the community and the affirmation to say, 'Austin, we like your stuff.' I totally feel blessed and privileged to be able to do this."

Burke, a native of Archbald, is well known across northeastern Pennsylvania for his decades of leadership in economic development. He served for 40 years with the Greater Scranton Chamber of Commerce and later as Pennsylvania's Secretary of Community and Economic Development under Governor Ed Rendell.

But while business and civic leadership have defined his professional life, art has long lived quietly alongside it.

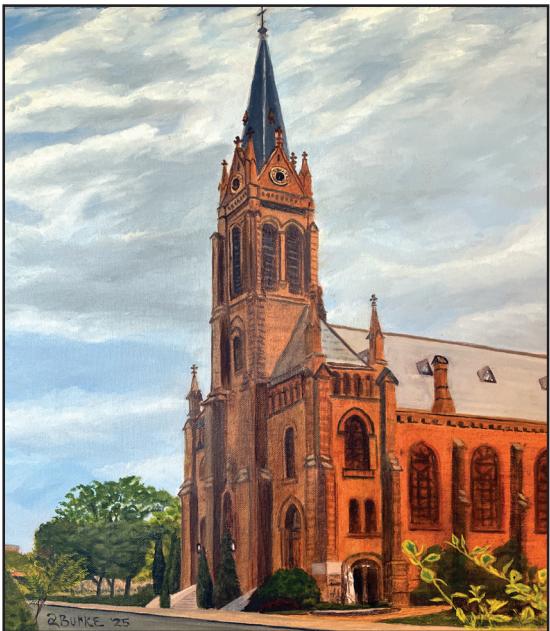
"I've always had an interest in art," Burke said.

That interest took a more serious turn in 1997 during a family vacation in Florida, when Burke borrowed a set of



Above: Annunciation Church in Williamsport, the primary worship site of Saint Joseph the Worker Parish, as depicted in a painting by local artist Austin Burke.

Top Right: The painting of Saint Nicholas Church in Wilkes-Barre that will be auctioned off later this year.



Bottom Right: Austin Burke's completed painting of Saint John the Evangelist Church in Honesdale.

watercolors and began painting community clouds.

"When I came home, I continued," he joked. "I started slow. I painted trees for the next month."

After retiring in 2013, Burke audited art courses at Keystone College and immersed himself in color theory, perspective, and drawing.

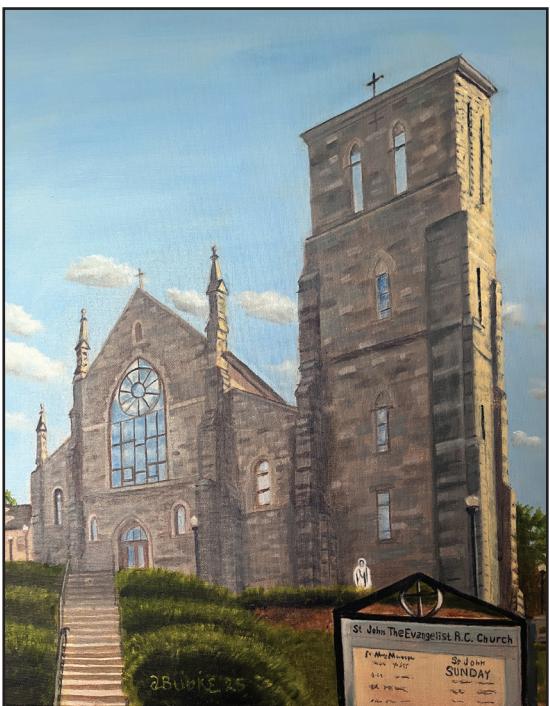
"I ended up taking 15 art courses and that really upped my game," he acknowledged.

Over time, his paintings of Scranton-area landmarks gained attention. But Burke found himself increasingly drawn to churches.

"I think the most iconic buildings that we have in Lackawanna County are all of our churches," he said. "They are real treasures that we have."

For Burke, churches represent far more than architecture.

"A church is where humanity encounters God," he reflected. "Not only do you encounter God there, but you meet your



Diocesan leaders embraced the idea — and encouraged him to expand beyond his home region.

"The Bishop said, 'Would you mind doing a few more out in Williamsport, Muncy and Stroudsburg?'" Burke recalled. "I was honored."

Each painting is a significant commitment.

Most are 16-by-20-inch oil paintings, with the Cathedral of Saint Peter a little larger. Burke and his wife, Marianne, travel to each location, carefully photographing the church under ideal lighting conditions.

"Morning light is different from evening light," he explained.

Continued on Page 13

Parishes to hold collection for Church in Latin America Jan. 24-25

SCRANTON - On the weekend of Jan. 24-25, 2026, parishes in the Diocese of Scranton will take the annual Collection for the Church in Latin America, which supports ministries among the poor in Mexico, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

"This annual collection exemplifies the spiritual journey of Pope Leo XIV, who was born in Chicago but spent most of his ministry serving the poor in Peru," said Bishop Edgar M. da Cunha, SDV, of the Diocese of Fall River, and chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Subcommittee on the Church in Latin America, which oversees this annual collection and the grants it funds.

During the decade that then-Bishop Robert Prevost was Bishop of Chiclayo, his diocese received several grants from

the Collection for the Church in Latin America.

With this support, the diocese improved youth ministry in impoverished parishes, promoted care for the environment and educated thousands of parents, teachers and catechists in the prevention of child abuse.

"The Second Vatican Council, which ended a dozen years before Robert Prevost entered the Augustinian order, encouraged Catholics to reach out in love across all national borders, especially those between the wealthy global north and the developing global south," said Bishop da Cunha, a Brazilian whose diocese includes Portuguese and Spanish-speaking Catholics. "Pope Leo XIV's faith journey embodies the spirit of why the bishops of the United States created the Church in Latin America program six decades ago to

make an impact in Latin America."

In 2024, gifts to the Collection for the Church in Latin America provided more than \$8 million for 344 projects. Some sample projects are:

- Evangelization, faith formation and pastoral care of teenagers in the Archdiocese of Caracas, Venezuela, whose parents have migrated to work in other countries.

- Prison ministry in the notorious Litoral Penitentiary in Guayaquil, Ecuador, with 10,000 severely overcrowded inmates and frequent lethal violence.

- Forming hundreds of Haitian lay leaders in marriage ministry so they can promote strong families in a society that is disintegrating from poverty and gang violence.

- A conference for 1,500 Colombians

to seek peace in a six-decade civil war through evangelization that emphasizes Jesus's command to love our enemies.

- Preparing lay leaders in the Archdiocese of Havana, Cuba, to become evangelists in their communities, despite communist repression of the Catholic faith.

- An international gathering of 130 faith leaders in Mexico City to explore the continuing importance of the Vatican II document on Scripture, *Dei Verbum*.

"All of these projects represent the types of initiatives that inspired Father Prevost to go to Peru as a missionary," Bishop da Cunha said. "In supporting the Collection for the Church in Latin America, we are able to honor Pope Leo XIV and, above all, serve the Lord who calls us to love our neighbors."

Sacred spaces captured on canvas to support Catholic Foundation

Continued from Page 12

In his home studio, the process begins with days of sketching.

"If you don't get the sketch right, you don't know what you're going to paint," he said.

In total, Burke estimates that each painting takes about 200 hours from start to finish.

"These churches, they have great stained glass, stonework and buttresses," he said. "Those lines often pull the whole painting together."

Painting, for Burke, is a daily discipline.

"I like to paint most mornings," he said, noting author Stephen King's advice to work every day. "I would bet you that I paint four or five days a week for several hours."

Some churches present unique challenges. He joked about the countless stones at Saint Catherine of Siena Church in Moscow but also acknowledged the joy that comes when a painting finally reveals a building's true beauty — as what happened with Annunciation Church (Saint Joseph the Worker Parish) in Williamsport.

"All of a sudden — bang — you can see what a beautiful church this is," he said, reflecting on the color he used for the columns near the church's stained-glass windows. "That was one of the delights."

For Burke, the greatest reward comes when others see the finished work.

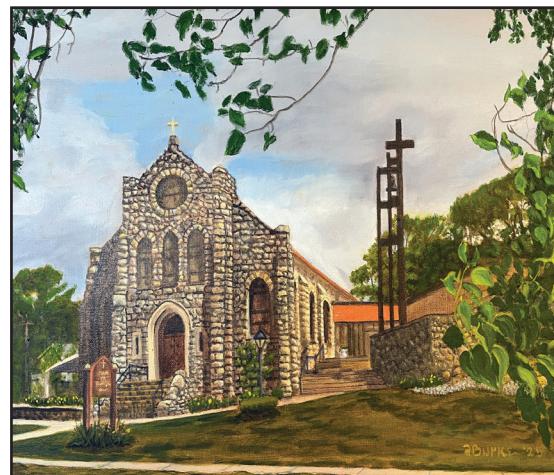
"When you get it right, you bring joy to people that see it — and that brings joy to me," he said.

Displayed in early January at a leadership donor reception for the Catholic Ministries Appeal, the paintings sparked pride among parishioners from across the Diocese.

Burke hopes his paintings also help people recognize the breadth and diversity of the Church of Scranton.

"I'd like to see people recognize how huge this diocese is," he said, "and the variations (of churches) depending on where immigrants come from."

As the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton prepares for an auction of Burke's paintings after Easter 2026, his effort already stands



Above: Saint Catherine of Siena Church in Moscow as depicted by local artist Austin Burke.



Right: The painting of Saint Luke Church in Stroudsburg that will be auctioned off later this year.

as a powerful witness. It is a reminder that stewardship takes many forms — and that the gifts God gives to each of us, when offered generously, can help build the Kingdom in unexpected and lasting ways.

"The Foundation is going to be great, and I hope this helps drive home the fact that we have one huge community," Burke said.

About the Online Art Auction

A select number of churches painted by local artist Austin Burke will be part of an online auction that opens in early May 2026. Information on how to participate will be forthcoming.

For early access to an opening bid for the auction, please contact Mark DiPippa, Executive Director of the Catholic Foundation for the Diocese of Scranton at (570) 207-2212 or MDiPippa@catholicfoundationscranton.org.