



# GATE OF HEAVEN

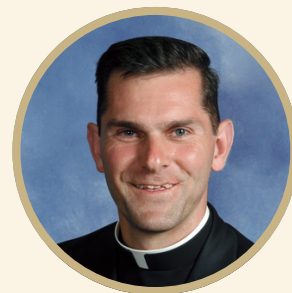


A NEWSLETTER OF FAITH, MEMORY, AND COMMUNITY  
FROM GATE OF HEAVEN CEMETERY

MAY 2026

*In This Issue...*

**A Legacy Moment**  
**Fr. James Brooks**



**Memorial Day 2026**

Join us this Memorial Day  
at the Gate of Heaven  
Priest Mound as we honor  
not only veterans, but all  
of the faithful departed.

*Memorial Day 2025 Aerial View*



GATE OF HEAVEN  
CEMETERY

*Archdiocese of Cincinnati*

[www.gateofheaven.org](http://www.gateofheaven.org)  
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# A Grieving Mother Remembers Fr. James Brooks

It was a pleasure to sit with Fr. Jan Schmidt and remember Fr. James Brooks, former parochial vicar and pastor of St. Margaret of York, who left us far too soon ten years ago. What stays with me is not only how Fr. James faced pancreatic cancer—with dignity, without complaint—but how he lived, and how he loved us, especially when we needed his pastoral care the most.

Fr. James grew up in a rural community north of Dayton and sensed his vocation early. As a young man he entered formation with the Legionaries of Christ, eventually studying in Rome, where his love for the Church deepened and took root. By the time he was assigned at St. Margaret of York, he brought with him not only theological depth, but a joyful, approachable spirit that drew people in—especially the young. He was first our parochial vicar and from the beginning he had a way of connecting. He met people where they were. He listened. He remembered names and stories. He preached with honesty and warmth—his homilies were not abstract, but deeply human, grounded in both his study and his prayer.

My son Grant came to know Fr. James during his seventh-grade retreat. Like many of the students, he was immediately drawn to him. After those

days together, Fr. James told me how he had watched Grant quietly include others, making sure no one was left out. He saw something in my son that I will always treasure—that spirit of generosity and belonging—and he named it, affirmed it, and held it up as something good and true. That was Fr. James. He noticed people. He called forth what was best in them. In 2015, our family's life changed forever. Grant, then a sophomore in high school, had been struggling with severe migraines that led to a deep and growing depression. In February, we lost him to suicide. Our world collapsed. The grief was overwhelming and words felt useless in the face of such loss.

Fr. Jan was our pastor - spiritual father - in those days, steady and faithful. And Fr. James walked beside us as a brother in Christ—present, attentive, and deeply compassionate. Together, they led our parish through a valley of sorrow we could not have navigated alone. Two weeks after Grant's death, Fr. James came to our home for dinner. He did not come with answers. He came with presence. He sat with us, prayed with us, and brought with him quiet gestures of love that we will never forget.

He gave our daughter Olivia a medal from Rome—one he had prayed over—so she could carry something tangible, a reminder that her brother was not lost to her. Then, almost spontaneously, he took a painting of the Blessed Mother holding the Child Jesus that hung in his office and gave it to me.

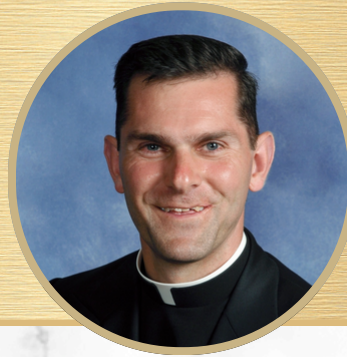
He spoke gently about Mary—about her own suffering, her own love as a mother—and reminded me that she now holds my son in a way I no longer could. In moments when the separation felt unbearable, I clung to that image: that a mother's love is never lost, only transformed and entrusted to God.



*Fr. James Brooks*

# By Diane Egbers

*Guest Columnist*



When I later asked him why he brought the painting, he simply said he had been moved in prayer.

*“Those weren’t my words,” he told me. “I was just the instrument.”*

He also shared something that, at the time, felt both difficult and strangely consoling: that every life has a beginning, a middle, and an end known to God before a single breath is taken. We did not receive the miracle we had prayed for. But we were being invited—gently, painfully—to take up our cross and follow Christ, trusting that even this suffering could be carried with Him. That trust did not come easily. But Fr. James stayed with us in it.

We asked him to return and speak to a group of Grant’s friends—thirty young people trying to make sense of something senseless. He prayed with them, spoke honestly about grief and faith, and helped them begin to walk a path toward healing. He did not rush the sorrow. He helped us learn how to carry it together.

There are countless stories like these. Quiet moments. Personal encounters. Small acts of grace that revealed a much larger love. Not long after, Fr. James himself became ill. Within a year, he was gone.

I never had the chance to fully thank him—to tell him how profoundly he had shaped our lives, how he had reflected Christ to us in a time when we could barely see light at all. But perhaps this remembrance is, in some small way, that thank you.

He was a priest who stayed. A brother who walked with his parish family. A man who allowed the Holy Spirit to work through him with humility and courage.

We miss him deeply. We love him still. And we trust that one day, when our own journey is complete, he will be there—walking with us once more, leading us home to the Lord.

Fr. James is buried at Gate of Heaven Cemetery on the priest mound. May his soul, and all the souls of the faithfully departed rest in peace.

**Amen.**

*Honoring Life on Sacred Ground*



*Ash Wednesday - 2014*

## Sharing Your Loved One’s Story

Every story is a legacy. We would be honored to help share your loved one’s legacy in this newsletter.

Contact our archivist  
Dianne Brown at  
[dbrown@gateofheaven.org](mailto:dbrown@gateofheaven.org)



# A Most Natural Desire

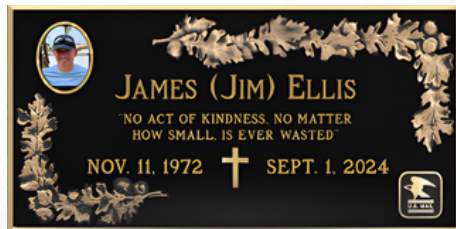
*The Importance of Memorialization in the Catholic Cemetery | By Robert Cloar*



As an adolescent, water would leak into the basement of my parent's house whenever there was a hard rain. They prolonged the inevitable for as long as they could, but eventually arranged for a sump pump to be installed. I don't understand all the technical elements of the work, but the perimeter of the basement got new concrete. In one area of the unfinished basement, my sister and I judged that to be a suitable place to leave a common childhood cenotaph, and using our fingers, engraved our initials and the date into the soft concrete. My mom discovered it a few weeks later, when the work was finished; thankfully, she found it amusing, and even expressed regret we didn't invite her to do the same. I lived in that house from the age of 6 to 17; my parents had it built when we moved to Cincinnati. My parents still live there, though I know they're considering downsizing soon. It gives me an odd sense of satisfaction to know that my initials are etched into the basement concrete, for some other family to see that I was there. Where did you write, carve, or etch your name as a child? Is it still there?



*Bob & Maureen's marker includes lyrics from "Too Young" by Nat King Cole, one of their wedding songs*



*Mr. Ellis' marker is further personalized by a photo, a meaningful quote, and an emblem relating to his profession*

Pondering this, I realize this is one of our most natural desires. From the moment we learn how to write our names, what comes next is the seemingly insatiable desire to write it everywhere – in wet concrete, graffitied on school lockers, bleachers, or dorm-room furniture, carved into tree trunks, duplicated time and again on paper until we have a satisfactory rendition. I recall practicing my signature hundreds of times until I thought it looked “cool.” Don't we all do that? We in Catholic cemetery ministry do the same thing. Our focus on memorialization enables a customer to fulfill the childlike desire to leave their name somewhere, to leave evidence of their existence and impact here. The tree may fall, the sidewalk may be torn up,

the personalized coke bottle recycled, and even my parent's basement might be demolished someday. Where then, will my name remain? What evidence will remain that I existed? The memorial marker, after all, is the most lasting visible element of the funeral and cemetery experience. The Church, likewise, stresses the importance of the memorial marker. Christianity isn't meant to be an anonymous faith, practiced alone or in-secret. Christ calls us to live as public witnesses to His Gospel. Burial in a Catholic Cemetery is a public testament of the deceased's faith and hope in the final resurrection. To satisfy the “public” element, there must be a memorial marker.

An objection I've sometimes heard regarding the arrangement of a memorial marker is something along these lines: “everyone who cares about me knows that I'm here.” This objection fails to account for the public, communal nature of Christian faith. Our heavenly hope is to join the “Communion of Saints” not a celestial reincarnation of our own earthly families. Through baptism, we joined the family of Christ, his Church, and all who believe in Him. The memorial marker is perhaps more important, then, for everyone who doesn't care about you.



*This marker, adjusted for privacy as both are still living, includes an inside joke of the couple's - Jacqueline's common response to being late.*

Gate of Heaven Family Service Advisors are trained to design meaningful, personalized, and thoughtful memorials. A few memorable markers I've designed over the years are pictured throughout this article. Let us help make yours.

Robert is the Family Services Administrator at Gate of Heaven Cemetery. He can be reached at [rcloar@gateofheaven.org](mailto:rcloar@gateofheaven.org) or 513-489-0300 x234 or 513-965-4040

# Many Titles, One Loving Mother Mary, Gate of Heaven

By Deacon Tim Schutte, Outreach / Evangelization Manager



Throughout the centuries, the Blessed Mother has been honored by Christians with a rich tapestry of titles that express the many ways she participates in God's plan of salvation. Some titles arise from Scripture, others from the reflections of the Church and the devotion of the faithful. Each title reveals something about who Mary is and how she continues to guide believers toward her Son, Jesus Christ.



Among the most familiar titles are Mother of God, formally affirmed at the Council of Ephesus in 431, which proclaims that the child she bore is truly divine. She is also known as Our Lady of Sorrows, reflecting her faithful presence at the foot of the Cross, and Our Lady of Guadalupe, recalling her loving appearance to Juan Diego in Mexico. The Church has also long invoked her as Star of the Sea, guiding believers through life's storms, and Queen of Heaven, a title that celebrates her glory with the risen Christ.

One of the most beautiful and ancient titles given to Mary is "Gate of Heaven." This title reflects a

profound spiritual truth: through Mary, Christ entered the world, and through Christ the gates of heaven are opened to humanity. Because she freely said "yes" to God's invitation at the Annunciation, she became the doorway through which the Savior came into the world. In that sense, Mary is honored as the one through whom heaven came to earth—and who now gently leads believers toward heaven.

For Catholics, this title carries special meaning when associated with a place of sacred rest such as Gate of Heaven Cemetery. On December 4, 1946, Archbishop John T. McNicholas declared, "The name of our new cemetery will be Gate of Heaven." It was a name chosen with deep theological significance.



A Catholic cemetery is more than a resting place; it is a quiet proclamation of resurrection. The title Gate of Heaven reminds us that death is not the end of the story. In Mary, the faithful see a loving mother who accompanies her children on their journey and points always to Christ, who has opened the true gate to eternal life. Thus the name stands as both a tribute to the Blessed Mother and a promise of hope for all who await the joy of heaven.

Mary, Gate of Heaven...pray for us, now and at the hour of death. Amen.

## Memorial Day | Field Mass & Presentation

Presentation | May 25<sup>th</sup>, 10:30 AM  
Field Mass | May 25<sup>th</sup>, 11:00 AM

Join us for this day of remembrance and prayer on the sacred ground of Gate of Heaven Cemetery. We will gather at the Priest Mound for the Memorial Day Presentation and the Annual Memorial Day Field Mass. Our remembrance gathering expresses our faith in Christ's resurrection, our gratitude for those who served for our country.

## Pre-Planning Seminars

June 23 | 11 AM, 2 PM, or 6 PM

Does your family know your wishes for your final resting place? Gate of Heaven's Family Service Advisors are here to help you plan with dignity, honor your wishes, and offer your family peace of mind. RSVP to 513-489-0300 or [community@gateofheaven.org](mailto:community@gateofheaven.org)

## Shroud of Turin Presentation

June 5 | 7:00 PM  
June 6 | 1:00 PM

Join us to discover the most recent scientific discoveries of the Shroud of Turin, presented by John Leyendecker, a Director of The School of Faith. John will be bringing a life-sized museum grade replica of the shroud. RSVP to 513-489-0300 or [community@gateofheaven.org](mailto:community@gateofheaven.org)

# A Ministry of Compassion

By Corinne Rutzke, Outreach Associate



There are few sorrows as deep as the loss of a child, including loss through miscarriage. During the early moments of heartbreak, families often search for answers, comfort, dignity and peace. At Gate of Heaven Catholic Cemetery, a quiet coordinated group of ministries exists to walk gently with parents through this unimaginable grief.

Family Services Advisor, Verna Lawhorn, often assists families who may not realize they can request a Funeral Mass of Christian Burial for their miscarried child through their parish before burial. In this sacred liturgy, families are surrounded by prayer, love, and the hope of eternal life as they entrust their child to God.



*Verna Lawhorn, FSA*

Since the 1950's, Gate of Heaven has ensured that no family bears a financial burden during such a painful time. There is no charge for children under age two, including those lost through miscarriage. Burial location, interment, burial service, ongoing care, and memorialization through a marker are all provided. Each child also receives the Catholic Rite of Committal prayers in a chapel or at graveside, reflecting the immeasurable value of every

life created by God. One of the most tender signs of care for babies less than 20-weeks-gestation comes through dedicated volunteers. More than fifteen years ago, small wooden burial vessels for these smallest among us, began to be crafted and donated. Nearly ten years ago, Verna hoped to provide a softer interior to the burial vessels. A group of women from the New Richmond area, Angels' Wings, created tiny burial garments from donated wedding gowns. Because even these were sometimes too large for the smallest miscarried infants, they were later replaced by delicate bunting wraps made from donated wedding gowns. Verna then approached Good Shepherd Community, where volunteers began sewing the buntings. Recently, several pastel mothers' gowns were donated for fabric by Kim Kraus, owner of The Queen's Lace in the bridal district. Volunteers continue to be coordinated through Verna Lawhorn who can be reached at [vlawhorn@gateofheaven.org](mailto:vlawhorn@gateofheaven.org).



*Baby Bunting*

Infants less than 20-weeks-gestation are lovingly wrapped in one of the buntings chosen by their parents and placed into a handmade wooden

burial vessel crafted and donated by Ron Duvelius, parishioner of The Good Shepherd Community. Gate of Heaven Cemetery also proudly supports Heaven's Gain Ministries, which provides education, support, and supplies for mothers and couples experiencing pregnancy loss. Gate of Heaven is partnered with Companions on a Journey, a grief support group, that meets at the cemetery on the second Tuesday of each month at 3:30 PM and 6:00 PM.

In 2025, 72 children under the age of two were laid to rest at Gate of Heaven, including 43 babies under 20-weeks-gestation. There are three Baby Gardens at Gate of Heaven; two are filled. The current garden near the bell tower, holds the smallest among us. Along the pathway, children laid to rest on the left are those lost between 20-weeks-gestation and two years of age. On the right are babies less than 20-weeks-gestation, who lived only in the womb, yet are no less cherished. Each life, however brief, is precious in the eyes of God and forever held in His love and in the hearts of their parents.

## Honoring Life on Sacred Ground



*Gate of Heaven Baby Garden*