

ATRIUM TOUR

(7) San Damiano Cross

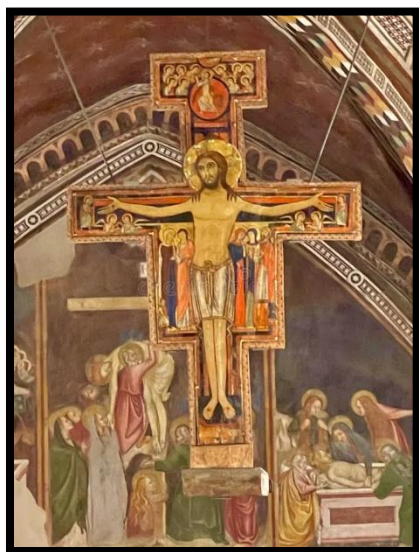
The **San Damiano Cross** is a 12th-century Byzantine-style crucifix that has become one of the most recognizable symbols of the Franciscan tradition. Its significance is rooted in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, who, while praying before this cross, heard Christ speak the words: *“Rebuild my Church.”* This moment became the spiritual catalyst for Francis’s mission and the broader Franciscan movement.

The cross displayed above the main altar at Roger Bacon High School continues this rich tradition through a carefully crafted reproduction created by Demetz Art Studio. Located in Ortisei, within the Dolomites, the studio is internationally renowned for its sacred art and woodcarving expertise.



Founded in 1872, Demetz remains a family-run business now in its fifth generation. The studio blends traditional craftsmanship with modern techniques, producing works that are both artistically refined and spiritually meaningful.

The Roger Bacon cross measures 77 inches in height and 57 inches in width, with a three-dimensional corpus approximately 4 feet long. It stands as a visual and spiritual centerpiece—linking students to the Franciscan call to renewal, service, and faith.



Today, the original cross is preserved in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi. It presents a distinctive theological image of Christ—not as defeated in suffering, but as triumphant and radiant. Surrounding Him are both heavenly and earthly figures, emphasizing the communion of saints and the glory of the Resurrection.

The original artist of the San Damiano Cross remains unknown, though it is widely believed to have been created by a Syro-Byzantine monk traveling through Umbria in the 12th century. The cross reflects strong Eastern Christian artistic influences, particularly in its stylized features such as elongated forms and expressive eyes.

Crafted from solid walnut, the cross stands approximately 6 feet 4 inches tall and 5 feet wide. It has been under the care of the Poor Clares since 1212, the contemplative Franciscan order founded by St. Clare of

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Assisi. A restoration in 1938 preserved its vivid imagery, allowing it to remain a focal point of devotion in the chapel of St. George within the basilica.

A replica of the San Damiano Cross was also acquired during the 2016 Assisi Scholars pilgrimage and now hangs in the Carol Dauwe Fine Arts Center at Roger Bacon.

Together, these sacred images serve as daily reminders of the Franciscan mission: to rebuild, renew, and live out faith through action. In this way, the San Damiano Cross is not only a historical artifact—it is an enduring invitation to transformation.

The cross was made possible by generous gifts from **Rose Doepker** and **Thomas and Patricia Bill**.

Rose Doepker '49 is an Our Lady of the Angels (OLA) alumna. A faithful participant in First Friday Mass, her staunch support of the Franciscans is evident in her humility and commitment to her faith. Her Franciscan charism is manifested in a life of “caring for others.” Rosella was a 2024 winner of the prestigious Amaranth Award – presented to an OLA alumna who has made significant contributions to their communities while demonstrating a commitment to the school's values and mission. Rose says: *“I was raised and influenced by my Catholic faith, from parents and attending Catholic schools. I received the Amaranth Award in 2024, representing OLA High School. It is rewarding for me to contribute now, in many special ways. I am looking forward to the completion of the new, beautiful Roger Bacon chapel. The San Damiano crucifix, placed above the altar, will be an inspiration for all.”*



Thomas and Patricia Bill are Westside cradle Catholics who attended Elder High School and Seton High School in the late 60's. Their children attended Catholic grade schools and high schools. Faith has always been a strong fixture throughout their lives. With Tom's involvement with the Poor Clares and the ideals and values exhibited by the Franciscans at Roger Bacon, they felt this commitment was one small way to openly express “thanks” for all the good bestowed upon them and their family.

