



## Offering What The Customer Wants

By Shelly Speedling

I was in my office yesterday working on our bookwork when my ears perked up to the conversation on the radio station. Normally I have a radio on in the background, and I have been known to phone in on trivia questions or contests to win concert tickets or perhaps a meal in a new restaurant. Okay, to be totally truthful, I sprint across the long floor sometimes hurdling molds or chairs just to get to the phone. Early on my husband warns new employees about this sport of mine!

This time however, there were no contests or need to rush. The afternoon announcer was talking about how he and his wife were living apart still after almost a year; she in Iowa while he in Minnesota. This living arrangement was because he was offered this job and they hadn't been successful in selling their home yet. He asked callers to offer some advice, and that they did. Some said the usual like replace the carpet or spruce up the paint job with neutral, warm colors. However, one caller told about taking a St. Joseph statue (this is where I got really attentive), and bury it in the backyard.

She went on to say that there is an actual St. Joseph kit that is sold in stores (and yes, her store sold it). St. Joseph is the Catholic Churches Patron Saint of Carpenters. The caller instructed that you take a statue of St. Joseph, dig a hole near the For Sale sign, and bury the it upside down facing the house and you should be seeing SOLD on that sign

fairly shortly after.

Now, the caller said the statue could be made out of concrete, wood, or any type of material in order to work.

I wondered why I had never heard of such a thing. We produce and sell a concrete St. Joseph statue and I will admit it is not the best selling statue we have ever had. St. Francis on the other hand is a very good seller.

Then, I got thinking, was this just a marketing ploy and if so, I bet people will give it a try just to see. So, I was curious and so I did a little bit of research on the

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internet and it appears that this practice has been going on for decades.

According to the US Catholic Information Center in Washington D.C. apparently it dates back to the mid-1500s when Theresa of Avila was praying for more land to build a convent in Europe. She had the nuns pray to St. Joseph to intercede on their behalf and then buried medals with his likeness on them in the ground as a symbol of their devotion.

Not only did they get the land, but the convent was named St. Joseph in his honor. According to the Dictionary of Saints by John J. Delaney, Joseph is a multifaceted saint. He is known as patron of the Universal Church, a model for fathers of families, a protector of workingmen and a patron for social justice.

There are two St. Joseph statues - St.

Joseph the worker, who carries a water pitcher, a loaf of bread and an ax by his feet, and St. Joseph patron of the family, who is holding his foster son, the child Jesus.

It is not completely agreed upon which St. Joseph statue is the correct one to bury but many say the one holding the child is the favored. The manner in which the statue is to be buried varies as well, some say in the backyard, others say facing the sign, and we may never truly know. The fact is, many people have tried this and have had successful results.

Bombry's Ornamental Concrete in Toledo, Ohio offers a 5" resin St. Joseph Home Seller product. On their website it says the tradition of

burying a statue of St. Joseph, finds its roots in the ancient Catholic custom. Today home owners of all denominations ask for his help in buying and selling their homes. Also included is instructions and prayer.

Another website I found was [www.stjosephsellshomes.com](http://www.stjosephsellshomes.com) out of Pennsylvania. On this site if you purchase the statue, you get a plastic bag with it too. With this bag, you are suppose to place the statue in (their statue is plastic and a smaller version.) I would have to say, that if you were to take an airtight bag and put a concrete statue in, the plastic would not allow the concrete to breathe properly and you may find yourself with crumbling concrete.

Anyway, after the house sells, you are suppose to dig up the statue once again and take it with you when you move and put it in a place of honor in your new home. They

state that the plastic bag is just for keeping the statue clean because of the burial into the dirt.....and that makes sense. Other stories I have seen said bury in a box or bury like it is and wash it after digging it up.

I found several other articles from the Washington Post, New York Times, and Boston Globe which all had similar stories of the St. Joseph being buried in this fashion to boost home sales. It appears that Catholic priests have no problem with this as long as it is done as an act of faith and not one of superstition. The Catholic Church frowns upon sales gimmicks however. The Roman Catholic Church encourages devotion to the saints, and does not mind appeals for divine intervention.

It seems as if real estate agents are very familiar with this practice as well from their clients. Some have gone so far as to give their clients a statue for listing their real estate with them. I truly hope that this intrigues people of all faiths to give it a try.

I would love to hear your results or past stories of your own.

One story I read stated that the statue should be buried 12" deep. Nonetheless, I wonder if the trend is going strong now or is it dormant. I also wonder why, after all these years of creating statues, why is this the first time I have heard of this practice? So, you will be seeing some changes in my store and on my concrete statue website as well when it comes to St. Joseph. I will place a little write up about the statue for others to become informed.

As mentioned prior, we sell plenty of St. Francis statues each year. St. Francis is one of our most popular religious statues. He is the patron saint of animals and charitable deeds and commonly placed in a garden setting. One of the favorable things concrete statue producers have over other type of statue producers such as plastic or wood, is that concrete will hold up better outdoors provided the correct care is given. Our customers commonly come in and tell us they bought the cutest statue of something and then tell us that it blew over and cracked or that it started fading and delaminating, so they then turn to concrete, admitting that initially less expensive cost was the factor for purchasing a plastic type form. In the

long run, they wished they had come to us first. St. Francis (1182-1226) called for simplicity of life, poverty, and humility before God.

When my husband and I got into producing concrete statues I will admit I had some reluctance to just how many religious statues we would offer, although I do hold a Christian faith. I felt that it might cause some controversy just as having gargoyles and Buddha statues present. I also see hesitation in some other concrete statue producers as well as wholesale customers we sell too. I have found that non-Catholic wholesale customers will kindly refuse suggestions we will give them when it comes to offering their customers religious statues of the saints or Virgin Mary. They do tend to be okay with offering angels or cherubs.

I learned though that I am very proud of selling the religious saints and have learned that it is not just a 'Catholic' purchase. I did however feel the need to call my priest a few years ago when we talked about getting into selling Buddha statues at our retail establishment. I clearly felt that I was going against my religion and needed to be more knowledgeable when it came to other religions and their practices. He soon put my mind to rest that it was okay and that the Buddha statue is just like an angel or Virgin Mary statue. As long as one is not worshipping that statue directly it is fine. The statue is not the God itself.....those statues represent a symbol of ones faith.

I do truly feel that if you produce or sell concrete statues; make your decisions on what you offer based off of what you are comfortable with selling. However, don't close your mind completely to what your customers may be wanting too. I know that the day my husband said we should sell gargoyles caught me off guard. Oh my goodness! That threw me for a loop. These statues are not a religious figure but yet something initially eerie left me cringing at first. "You want to sell these scary, satanic looking rottweiler dogs with wings!" Well, I got over it, and see them as a piece of architectural history.

We are very close to the Mayo Clinic and Mayo Brothers home and many gargoyles are depicted in the architectural structure

of these facilities. I don't believe that they fly over and guard us at night, but customers of all ages and genders request concrete gargoyles and thankfully that message I have come to know is of peace and safety and not of dark demons. I wouldn't put them into my favorite category of items we make and sell, but they no longer bother me.

On a closing note, we had a newlywed couple stop back and show us their wedding photo posing with their 36" plus concrete gargoyle they had purchased from us a month prior. That may have gone too far for my taste, but isn't everyone's different preferences truly what makes the world a more interesting place to live in?

### About the Author

*Shelly Speedling - Owner of SVJ Creative Designs together with her husband David.*

*SVJ Creative Designs produces concrete statuary and decorative ironwork.*

*SVJ Creative Designs also creates custom iron railings for homes and businesses. Shelly and Dave have three children ages 17, 15, & 11. They reside in Minnesota.*

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