

St. Joseph ~ The Patron Saint of Real Estate



By Brian Madigan

March 19th is the feast of St. Joseph who has become known as the Patron Saint of real estate. The original connection was probably made because St. Joseph was a carpenter. And, rumour had it that he could work "miracles" with wood.

Now, real estate agents, psychics, religious artifact stores, the Home Depot and eBay are all in on the act.

Here's the folklore or current urban myth: Bury a plastic statue of St. Joseph in the yard, and a successful closing won't be long in the offing.

The history of the matter according to Barbara Mikkelson is set out as follows, "The reputed origins of the practice vary. Some say an order of European nuns in the Middle Ages buried a medal of St. Joseph — while asking the saint to intercede — in its quest for a convent. Others claim it may be connected to a practice by German carpenters who buried the statues in the foundations of houses they built and said a prayer to St. Joseph. Yet others trace the connection to a chapel building effort in Montreal in the late 1800s. Brother Andre Bessett wanted to buy some land on Mount Royal in Montreal to construct a small chapel called an oratory. When the landowners refused to sell, Bessett began planting medals of St. Joseph on the property. In 1896 the owners suddenly relented and sold, and Bessett was able to build his oratory.

But these theories may well be instances of retrofitting lore to a custom because mentions older than contemporary times have failed to materialize in standard folklore references. That the custom now has an interesting backstory does not mean its backstory is valid or even that old.

The practice of burying a plastic St. Joseph to help speed the sale of a home dates at least to 1984 in the U.S.A. In 1990 it seemingly became all the rage, with realtors buying plastic saints' statues by the gross. The standard practice calls for the statue to be dug up once the property has sold and placed on the grateful seller's mantle or in another place of honor. Some, however, who have trouble remembering where they interred their statues prefer to leave the buried saints where they've been placed to help protect the properties for the new owners. (Which may not work all that well — some believe leaving the statue underground will cause the land to continue changing hands.)

But why Joseph, you ask? Why not another saint — say, St. Jude, patron saint of lost causes?

Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, is the patron saint of home and family in the Roman Catholic religion. According to one of the hottest new customs, the statues are buried upside down and facing the road in front of a house for sale.

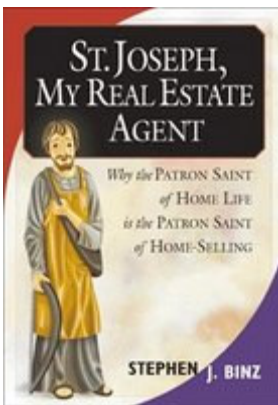
Actually, different realtors quote different placements of the statue:

- Upside down, near the 'For Sale' sign in the front yard. (An upside down St. Joseph is said to work extra hard to get out of the ground and onto someone's mantle.)
- Right side up.
- In the rear yard, possibly in a flower bed.
- Lying on its back and pointing towards the house "like an arrow.
- Three feet from the rear of the house.
- Facing the house.
- Facing away from the house. (One who tried this reported the house across the street sold, and it hadn't even been up for sale.)
- Exactly 12 inches deep.



The custom of burying St. Joseph has become so widespread that some religious goods stores even offer a Home Sale Kit, which includes a plastic statue, a prayer card, and an introduction to the St. Joseph home sale practice.

Prudent realtors also recommend the following advice in addition to burying Joe: "For this practice to be fully effective, the seller must, of course, first do such practical yet all important chores as completing all necessary fix-up, properly staging the home and finally, adjusting the price so as to exactly reflect market value."



Many who have experienced difficulty selling their homes have reported seemingly miraculous sales shortly after burying a statue of St. Joseph on their property. Stephen Binz's 2003 book, *Saint Joseph, My Real Estate Agent*, is replete with many such examples. However, one tale included in the book — which might well be apocryphal — points that everything doesn't always go as planned. One impatient man moved his statue from the frontyard to the backyard to the side of the house and finally threw it in the trash. A few days later the frustrated seller opened the newspaper and saw the headline "Local Dump Has Been Sold."

So, fact or fiction, that's the story!

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