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ST. JOSEPH CHURCH OF LIEBENTHAL RECIPIENT OF 2025 PRESERVATION AWARD

Liebenthal, Kansas – October 10, 2025: The Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition (KPRLC) announces its 2025 Preservation Award to recognize successful efforts to preserve and restore structures built with native greenhorn limestone post rock. The award is presented to St. Joseph Church of Liebenthal.

Liebenthal was the first Volga-German settlement in Rush and Ellis Counties founded February 22, 1876. By the beginning of the 20th century, the first church, constructed in 1877, had become too small to accommodate the growing congregation.

In 1902, German-born architect, Viktor Klutho, of St. Louis, Missouri drew the design for a new Gothic style church. From 1902 until 1905, the members of the parish worked to complete the building. Stonework was completed by the parishioners with Father Rudolf Stollenwerk overseeing the construction. Over two thousand loads of native "Fencepost limestone" were quarried from nearby hills northeast of the town, moved by wagon, cut, shaped, stacked and set to form the walls of this beautiful building. In 1917, parishioners constructed a three-story limestone school with four classrooms, a gymnasium, lunchroom (parish hall), and living quarters for the nuns who taught in the school.

On August 13, 1917, a fire that originated in the rectory spread to the church roof and gutted the buildings. Father Stollenwerk again oversaw construction of the church using its original walls. The interior of the church was reconstructed nearly identical to its original appearance. A new rectory was constructed on the original site. The re-dedication took place on December 8, 1921.

In December 1959, fire again gutted the church, this time from faulty Christmas decorations. The church was reconstructed and dedicated on October 18, 1961. This time, the interior of the gothic cathedral was constructed in a more modern style, making it unique from other native limestone churches in the region.

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In 2014, the interior was repaired and painted. The church and other buildings have also had new roofs installed withing the past 10 years. In 2019, the copper steeple was restored with new copper and new copper crosses were installed at the top of the tower. In

2024, a member of the church purchased the three-story rectory with intent to preserve the ornately decorated structure. Many of the original furnishings remain in the residence and it retains much of its original character, with only updates to the plumbing and electrical systems.

In November, 2024, as part of the celebration of Rush County's 150 anniversary, the church, rectory, and school were reopened for public viewing for the first time in over two decades.

Today, St. Joseph Church, the tallest structure in Rush County, stands as one of the most beautiful churches on the Kansas plains and is a testament to the dedication and fortitude of our early settlers. The Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition congratulates St. Joseph Church as the recipient of its 2025 Preservation Award.

This is the third year the award has been presented. Previous winners include the Post Rock Scout Museum and Crispin's Drug Store Museum in Lincoln and the Dorrance Bankery in Dorrance.

The Kansas Post Rock Limestone Coalition encompasses 18 counties in central Kansas with headquarters in Lucas, Kansas. The mission of the organization is to promote, preserve, and protect the history, art, and architecture of the Kansas Post Rock Limestone region through education and tourism. The coalition is a 501(c)3 Kansas corporation and is governed by an eleven member board of directors representing counties within the region.

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