

# Sculptor to show ‘calm generosity’ in Cardinal Keeler bust

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Carrying a bucket of clay and a modeling stand, Nate Risteen arrived on the doorsteps of Cardinal William H. Keeler’s residence in downtown Baltimore with one goal in mind: scrutinize the cardinal’s physical characteristics.

Mr. Risteen, a 27-year-old sculptor who currently lives in Indiana, received the commission to complete a marble bust of Baltimore’s longtime spiritual leader, and this would be his one chance to spend some time with the cardinal.

“It was important to get the shape of his jaw, the shape of his hair and all the big proportions right,” remembered Mr. Risteen, who took measurements of the cardinal’s head and made a clay sculpture while moving 360 degrees around his famous subject.

“He was very helpful,” said Mr. Risteen, who spent two hours with the cardinal. “Whenever I wanted him to look a certain way, he did it. He just sat there praying his rosary while I worked.”

The fruits of that initial session will be unveiled April 13 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore when Mr. Risteen’s life-size bust of the cardinal will be dedicated. The sculpture will sit near the basilica’s entrance across from a marble bust of Cardinal Lawrence Shehan that Mr. Risteen carved during the restoration of the basilica.

The image of Cardinal Keeler shows Baltimore’s 14th archbishop in his 60s, wearing a cardinal’s zucchetto (skull cap) and the pectoral cross that once belonged to the founding archbishop of Baltimore, John Carroll. It was Archbishop Carroll who was the driving force behind building the basilica and Cardinal Keeler who was the leading advocate for restoring the historic basilica – the first Catholic cathedral in

the United States.

Mr. Risteen, who had earlier made a bronze sculpture of Cardinal Keeler, said he relied on many photos to help him capture his subject.

"I wanted to get to the essence of his character," said Mr. Risteen. "I found him to be a generous man and a capable leader. I wanted to show a calm generosity in him, but I also wanted it to be open to interpretation so anyone who knew him could bring their own interpretations to the work."

Mr. Risteen worked from a block of white Italian marble weighing about 600 pounds. The final bust weighs about 250 pounds.

Calling it "very challenging" to chisel marble, Mr. Risteen said the art form leaves no room for mistakes.

"It's a very slow process," said Mr. Risteen, noting that it took him about a year to complete the work. "There are a lot of technical difficulties supporting the weight."

The Catholic artist, who studied art at the University of Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, both in Philadelphia, said he was struck that Cardinal Keeler's profile is similar to Cardinal Shehan's. Calling it an honor to work on the project, he said he approached the commission with "a mix of excitement and fear that comes with a big opportunity."

Mark Potter, executive director of the Basilica Historic Trust, said the artwork was the idea of members of the basilica staff. It is a way to honor the cardinal for his contributions to the archdiocese and the basilica, said Mr. Potter.

"It was purely a gesture of love from all of us," said Mr. Potter, noting that the work was paid with donations from the cardinal's family. "It's so important he's remembered for all he's done."