

Beloved St. Francis Statue Stolen From Alton Church Garden

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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ALTON - A hammered copper St. Francis statue that had stood for decades in St. Paul's Garden at the Episcopal Parish of Alton was stolen sometime between Saturday evening, Sept. 12, 2026, and Sunday morning, Sept. 13, 2026, church officials said, and parishioners are asking for its return because of its longtime importance to the church and community.

"It is with absolutely heart breaking news that we report that our beloved St Francis statue that has stood watch in our St. Paul's Garden for decades has been stolen," the parish said in a statement. "We are begging whoever stole this to please return it to our church."

The statue was made by Hillis Arnold, described by the parish as a well-known St. Louis artist. The parish said the statue has been in the garden for about five decades and has been an "iconic part" of what makes the garden special.

The Rev. Garron Daniels said parishioners were at the church Saturday night, with one of the last people leaving sometime between 7 and 8 p.m. The theft was not noticed until Daniels arrived Sunday morning at 9:45 a.m.

The statue “wouldn’t have been easy” to take, Daniels said, because it had been reinforced.

“It must have been multi person job and taken time and being loud because of how reinforced it was,” Daniels said. “That is the heartbreaking part of it.”

The parish said generous parishioners have offered a \$1,200 reward for the statue’s safe return.

“This statue means so much to those who have spent decades worshipping, having fellowship, and caring for the garden,” the parish said. “We just want it returned back safely.”

Daniels said the statue’s absence has affected both church members and others who know the garden.

“It really does mean a lot to the church,” Daniels said, adding that one parishioner said they had seen the statue as a 10-year-old and never remembered it not being there. “It matters to a lot of people whether church member or not.”

The parish said it has contacted scrap yards and made police reports. Daniels said the church also has had copper downspouts stolen in the past two months and has filed three or four police reports related to those thefts. He said the church added lighting but had not yet installed cameras.

“Now we don’t have a choice to spend money,” Daniels said, calling the continued thefts “heartbreaking and frustrating.”

Anyone with information is asked to contact the church at 618-465-9149.