

MARIANIST WORLD DAY OF PRAYER

SUNDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2023



Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto
Mount St. John: Dayton, Ohio, USA

INTRODUCTION

Quite similar to the origins of the Marianist Family, our annual Marianist World Day of Prayer has its origins from within the Lay Branch. During the 1970s, Affiliates in St. Louis, Missouri in the United States, began a prayerful gathering on the Sunday closest to October 12, the feast of Our Lady of the Pillar. This gathering in prayer modeled Father Chaminade's own sacred time in prayer in the Basilica of Our Lady of the Pillar in Saragossa, Spain. The Provincial at the time, Father Quentin Hakenewerth, then invited the whole Province of St. Louis to share in this annual prayerful gathering. When Father Quentin was elected the General Assistant for

Religious Life at the 1981 General Chapter of the Society of Mary, he invited the world wide Marianist Family to share in this prayerful annual gathering. Then when Father Jose Maria Arnaiz was elected as the next General Assistant for Religious Life at the 1991 General Chapter, he began the practice of identifying a specific Marian shrine as a focal point for our day of prayer.

The Marian shrine for our focus this year is Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto on the property of Mount Saint John in Dayton, Ohio, USA.

HISTORY OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES GROTTO (DAYTON, OHIO, USA)

In 1910, the Cincinnati Province of the Society of Mary purchased 100 acres of land just east of the City of Dayton and named this property "Mount St. John." Since that time, a variety of ministries, offices, and communities have come and gone from this property, such as a large working farm, provincial offices, and scholasticate. As of 2023, Mount St. John contains 150 acres of protected land featuring nature trails, a prairie, and the Marianist cemetery, as well as 6 ministries and 2 residential communities: North American Center for Marianist Studies; Marianist Mission; Bergamo Center for Lifelong Learning; Marianist Environmental Education Center; Queen of Apostles Parish; Meyer Hall SM Community; Gallery St. John; and the Marianist Novitiate.

But perhaps the most famous site on the property is Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, which, though not an official shrine, has been a site of prayer and pilgrimage for members of the Marianist Family and the local faithful for nearly 100 years. The grotto began as a dream of Brother Michael Mertes back in 1910. As the



Assistant Novice Master, Brother Michael lived at St. Ann's Novitiate on Mount St. John. He proposed the brothers construct a replica of the

Lourdes Grotto to give Mary a grand place of honor on their newly acquired property.

By 1925, Brother Michael and the novices began collecting limestone rocks from around the property to begin constructing the grotto. Meanwhile, they were able to obtain a proportional model of the Lourdes shrine in France so they could make an exact replica.

The site chosen for the grotto was a berry patch located across from the Novitiate building. Clearing the space and turning the flat land into a slope from which to construct the grotto was no easy task: it required loading rocks and dirt from all over the property and transporting in wooden wagons to the grotto site. Most of this work was done by the young novices.

For the central portion of the grotto, however, it was clear the brothers would need the help of professionals. They referred to the expertise of a statuary company in Chicago, who sent a team of five Italian immigrants in 1929 to begin this construction.

On top of the limestone rock collected from around the property, the brothers added three

loads of tufa rock, a coral-like rock found in the Great Lakes, which they ordered by freight train from Toledo, Ohio.

An outdoor solemn Mass (pictured below) to dedicate the grotto took place on Sunday, July 21, 1929.

When the initial construction of the grotto was finished, it measured 28 feet high by 22 feet wide. A few years later, Brother Michael and the novices added two garden wings onto the grotto which contained two waterfalls and a fish pond. Today the grotto measures 110 feet wide and contains over 230 tons of tufa rock.

The grotto continues to attract faithful visitors from the Marianist Family and larger Dayton Catholic community. It's rare to come to the grotto without seeing someone knelt in prayer next to the statue of St. Bernadette gazing up at Our Lady, or sitting deep in meditation on one of the benches facing the grotto. This shrine continues to be a sign of Mary's protection and constant presence to us today.

Our Lady of Lourdes, the Immaculate Conception, pray for us!



Intercessions

O God, our loving Creator, we gather as the Marianist Family on our annual World Day of Prayer with the focal point of Our Lady of Lourdes. It was at Lourdes that Mary identified herself to Bernadette Soubirous as “The Immaculate Conception.” Like the Ark of the Covenant, Mary is that pure vessel that held the Word of God and then gave it birth in Jesus. So, loving Father, we ask you to hear and answer our prayer made through the intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes:

- For Pope Francis and all pastors of our faith, that God’s holy grace may flow abundantly upon them in their pastoral role of leadership in the Church. We pray:
O Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us.
- In thanksgiving for the graced and faith-filled response of our Marianist ancestors who, like Mary, heard the Word of God and gave it flesh through their very lives. We pray:
O Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us.
- In your appearance to Bernadette at Lourdes, you called for the conversion of all people along with a deepening of the spirit of prayer and charity. May our Marianist Family be a living witness of on-going conversion, of a lively spirit of prayer, and a true charity to all. We pray:
O Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us.
- It is in your Magnificat, O Mary, that we come to see the rich presence of you as Mother and intercessor. Help us to praise God from the depths of our being; help us to be a living example of God’s mercy flowing upon each generation, and help us to be the loving hands that reach out to raise up the lowly and feed the hungry. We pray:

O Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us.

- In our annual gathering as the Marianist Family, we assemble on a date close to Our Lady of the Pillar. It was at this Marian shrine in Saragossa that Father Chaminade spent many hours in prayer and reflection. It was through his time there that he came to see that you, Mary, have a unique role in the ongoing development of the Catholic faith. Present and involved in all of the mysteries of Jesus, you were there from the beginning to the end, and then again at a new beginning. Help us to never lose sight of your words to us, “Do whatever He tells you.” And help us to live with an ever greater attentiveness to what he tells us. We pray:

O Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes, intercede for us.

Creative and Redeeming God, from the moment of her conception you found favor with Mary. What you have seen in her you desire to see in



each of us – a people full of grace, open and receptive to your Word so as to give it flesh in the world that you love so deeply. We thank you for our Marianist vocations. May others be touched by the grace which has called us forth

into the Marianist Family. Receive our prayer through the intercession of Mary, Our Lady of Lourdes and her son, your Son, Jesus the Christ.
Amen!