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# FALL 2024

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## Shrine Update



Having received the final invoice for this summer's restoration activities the Shrine Restoration Committee is evaluating the next stages of activities. The work first started in fall of 2015 with repair of the roof over the holy family grotto, since that time we have repaired/restored not only the Shrine itself, but

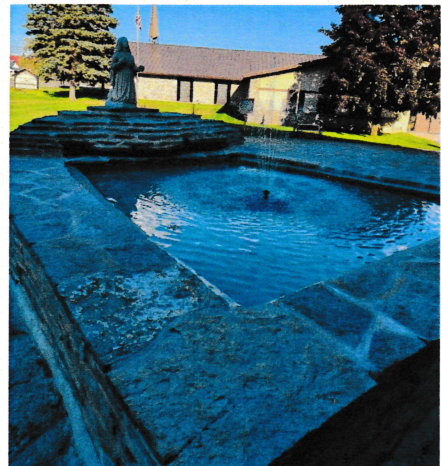


all of the marble statues on the grounds, the stations of the cross plaques and the crucifixion plaques. The work only being limited by the anticipated monies that would be received that season.

We humbly thank all of the generous donors who have supported this and previous years restoration activities. Work on the front face of the Shrine has been completed. Most impressive is the work completed on the ponds and water features. The photos really do not do it justice.

For the 2024 season, OLWS will have had over 28 tour groups totaling over 1000 visitors. But that number in no way reflects the total number of visitors, many of which just stop by and walk to view the Shrine.

With the intent of enriching the experience for our visitors, we have added audio tours in both English and Arabic to our website. We have also added the stations of the cross and other historical media on our website for visitors to access via their phones or other electronic devices. In the coming year we hope to be able to make additional languages available.



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# OBSERVATIONS

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## 2025 70th Anniversary—Going National

September 4, 2025, will mark the 70th anniversary of the dedication of **OLWS**. The Parish was part of the Diocese of Saginaw at that time, and the dedication was conducted by Bishop Stephen Woznicki, D.D. who encouraged the people of St. Mary to continue to grow, to work and to pray that the Shrine begun out of a simple devotion to the **Mother of God** may be used as an instrument of **God** in working miracles of Faith, great and small. (source Northern Shrine Plans Exposition, article by D.R. Thomas)

Quite some time has passed, and **OLWS** continues to draw both new and returning visitors. The Shrine as a symbol of Faith has been present, quietly reminding us of our Christian roots, the promise of **Our Lord** and the presence of **Our Lady** and her continued guidance in our lives if we open ourselves to her and her **Holy Son**.

As the National Shrine Committee here at **OLWS** met this past year, one of the early tasks was to clarify a mission statement and define the purpose of **OLWS**. To that end:

*OLWS exists to invite pilgrims to spiritual reflection on the eternal truths that lead to salvation and Mary's role in that plan as an example for each of us. The Shrine is a public expression of the faith community of St. Mary Parish joining in Christian witness to acknowledge Christ the King of the Universe and to honor his mother Mary as our intercessor by offering a place of spiritual refuge and peace, promoting evangelization, and inspiring respect for God's creation.*

We believe that this is consistent with the intent and purpose as visualized by Father Hubert Rakowski and the Parishioners of St. Mary Catholic Church and that by becoming a National Shrine **OLWS** will better achieve it's purpose. By becoming a National Shrine we believe that we will be able to reach a broader audience of pilgrims, that we have not been able to reach before. Father San and representatives of the National Shrine Committee anticipate meeting with Bishop Walsh after Thanksgiving to submit the application package for diocesan review. We ask for your support and prayers as we move forward in the process.

2025 is an anniversary year for both **OLWS** as well as St Mary -Mio Parish: the year being both the 70th anniversary of the **OLWS** dedication as well as the 50th anniversary of our present Parish church. Planning of anniversary events will begin this winter. Be sure to check our website for future activities.



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# CATHOLIC PRACTICES

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Do you light devotional candles? Have you ever wondered why? From this early photo in the Holy Family Grotto, you can see that the grotto was designed with the intent of providing space for many candles. The following extractions give us a better understanding of the practice.



- Catholics often light candles for an individual. This may be for the soul of a deceased loved one or someone who is sick. Prayers are said for those in need of divine intervention or a divine blessing. Individuals also light prayer candles when seeking divine guidance. The lighting of a votive candle isn't always in a prayer of request. Some Catholics light a candle in gratitude of blessings bestowed on them. (source: [Why Do Catholics Light Candles? Practices and Symbolism | LoveToKnow](#) )
- The Catholic custom of lighting candles has its roots in early Christian times, emerging from the Church teaching that Christ is the Light of the World (see Jn 8:12). “A votive candle really represents our prayer before God,” says Fr. Chris Alar, MIC, director of the Association of Marian Helpers. “We join our prayers to the light of Christ, allowing that light to burn on and on in our souls, even when we cannot be in a shrine physically. Christ is the Light of the World, and when we see the light of the candles, we are reminded of that hope.” (source: [Why Do We Light Candles? | The Divine Mercy](#) )
- Per Msgr. Charles E. Pope votive candles, and other size devotional candles are lit to symbolize prayers or devotion. The candle continues to burn for hours or days (depending on the size) and thus signals the prayer and love of the person who lit it, long after they must go.

Biblically, the root of this practice is the notion of a “burnt offering.” In the Old Testament, things of value (usually sacrificed animals) would be burned and thereby offered to God. The smoke was a symbol of the sacrifice of praise ascending to God.

Catholics who light candles are making an offering to God of prayer and praise. The fire of the candle symbolizes ardent love.

The consuming of the candle symbolizes the oblation (offering) of something of value to God: our time, our praise, our resources and so forth. The lingering quality of the candle symbolizes the fact that our prayers, praise and concerns continue in our heart even when we must leave the church. The flickering light also seems to say “Remember me, Lord, remember my prayer and those for whom I pray (source: [Why Are Votive Candles Used? | Simply Catholic](#) )

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# SUPPORTING SHRINE RESTORATION

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There are many ways to support Shrine Restoration be they big or small.

Below are just a few:

- Commemorate a special event or person with a [Legacy Paver](#). (forms available on line and in Gift Shop)
- Bequeath Our Lady of the Woods Shrine in your will or trust. We are a [501c\(3\)](#) organization.
- Set up an automatic donation or make a one-time donation using the [QR code](#).
- Donate [time or resources](#) to Shrine events.
- [Pray](#) for the continued success of the Shrine Restoration Activities.
- [Tell a friend](#) about the Shrine and events.
- Make a donation using the [Blue Envelopes](#) in the church pews, gift shop and grottos.



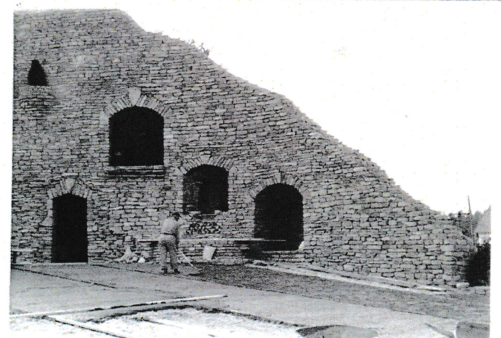
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## 2025 Restoration Activities

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With the completion of the front face of the Shrine, activities are turning now to the plaza /patio on the front of the Shrine. Costs for this work are anticipated to be at least twice those of previous stages of activities.

Exploratory work by contractors to verify the construction techniques used has been scheduled for yet this year. In order to minimize the impact to Shrine visitors, we plan to complete the work in one season. To do that we will have to pick up the pace of fundraising activities and ask our generous supporters and [Our Lady](#) to once again help us meet the 2025 anticipated costs.

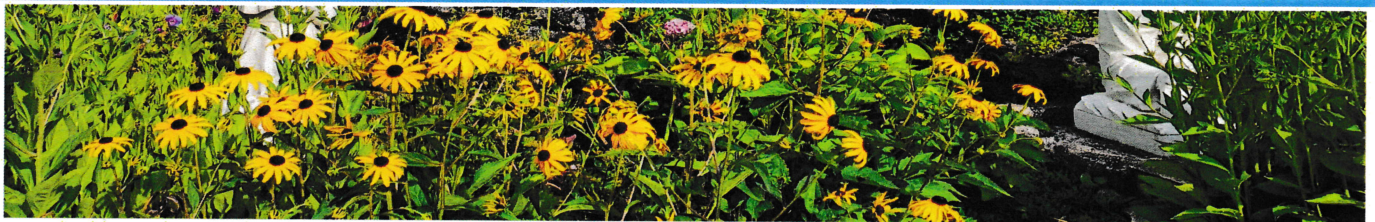


# Field of Gold



Late summer brings a field of gold to the **Our Lady of Fatima** flower bed. Rudbeckia plants lovingly selected and planted years ago continue to bring joy and beauty to **OLWS** and hint at the blaze of colors to come to northern Michigan in the fall.

**OLWS** has been blessed with a new crop of gardeners in the Parish who dove in to help maintain, and in some cases, revitalize beds. Early this year one parishioner divided one of her creeping phlox plants and this fall she and her helpers replanted the creeping phlox on the Polish Grotto live roof to provide a future show of spring color. It might not look like much, but as it spreads it will blanket the space. Thank you for your time and energy!



It has been the practice to mail out the **OLWS** newsletter to visitors and donors to the Shrine and Shrine Restoration. One-year ago we asked recipients to provide email addresses in an attempt to reduce costs. The number of persons responding did not make double digits.

Unfortunately the double edged sword to the growing number of visitors is that we have reached a point where the recent postage increase has resulted in the decision that we must go electronic. If you have received this newsletter via US Postal Service you are on record as a donor. Visitors with email addresses on record will receive the newsletter electronically.

We thank you for your understanding and support during this transition. Please feel free to reach out to us with any comments or suggestions.

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# VISIT THE SHRINE

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## Upcoming Events—2025

With the coming of fall, our gift shop will be reducing hours, and visitors should call to check on hours for their visit. The **Gift Shop** will be opening again on a daily schedule come May 2025. We will be adding a couple of new vendors, so come check out our new items.

Saturday Masses moved indoors at 4 PM to allow for the shortening days. Outdoor —6 PM Saturday Masses will return again Memorial Day Weekend. Bishop Walsh is presently scheduled to bless our outdoor altar at the first outdoor mass on May 24th, 2025. The second Saturday Mass of each month is for the intentions of our generous donors.

**Annual Yard Sale— June 20–21st** (tentative) is still in planning, so watch the website and Facebook for dates when we once again turn the church hall into one big yard sale with something for everyone!

We have a number of events in the works for this season including:

- **May 10th & 11th:** Mothers' Day—Silver Rose—Our Lady of Guadalupe Devotional
- **May 18th:** May Crowning— Our Lady of Fatima
- **June (to be determined):** Annual Walk-a-Thon for Shrine Restoration
- **July 13th or 20th:** Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Devotional.
- **August 15th:** Feast of the Assumption Celebration.
- **September 14th or 21st:** Our Lady of LaSalette Devotional



VISIT



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Tour groups are always welcome—Contact the Church Rectory to schedule your group large or small for 2025.

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