

A Time and Place set Aside for Christ and Our Lady

The Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage

It's official! The Archdiocese of St. Boniface decreed that the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes, in St. Malo, will henceforth be a diocesan sanctuary and the site of the Annual diocesan pilgrimage. On August 18, all are invited to attend this faith-filled event (1). Archbishop Albert LeGatt of St. Boniface explains the reasoning behind the decision, and the importance of pilgrimages for our Catholic faith.



The Grotto Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes in St. Malo was a popular shrine even before the Archdiocese declared it a place of regional pilgrimage in 1951 in the Acts of the Second Synod of St. Boniface. Photo: St. Boniface Historical Society.

The Grotto in St. Malo has long been, and remains, a popular pilgrimage site.

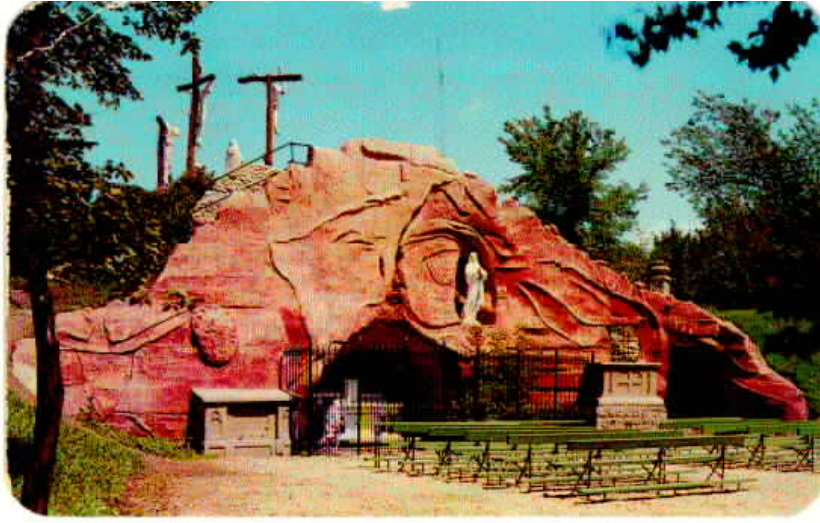
It's true. The shrine was a place of regional pilgrimage even before the 1951 decree emanating from the second diocesan synod, which formalized it as a site for regional pilgrimages. The faithful of the surrounding parishes frequently

went to St. Malo, especially for the Feast of the Assumption of Mary, held on August 15.

Other parishes organized regional pilgrimages dedicated to the Virgin Mary. In 1951, the Archdiocese recognized not only that of St. Malo, but those of the parishes of Sainte-Anne-des-Chênes in St. Anne, Saint-Viateur in St. Joseph, Notre-Dame-du-

Laus in Powerview, Notre-Dame-de-la-Salette in Beauséjour and the Sacred Heart of the Belgians in St. Boniface.

These pilgrimages go back further, of course. I imagine they were born as these parishes developed a devotion to the Virgin Mary, or if a priest had a plan to create a



Marian sanctuary, like the one at the Sacred Heart of the Belgians. In the 1930s, Father Damas Van Dyck, a Capuchin, had an exact replica of the grotto of Lourdes erected. It was an important place of pilgrimage until the parish closed in the 1990s.

The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes of the Sacred Heart of the Belgians.

Over the years, most regional pilgrimages became local parish celebrations or were simply no longer celebrated. However, the one in Saint-Malo has endured...

Indeed. A few decades ago, things were in decline. Now there's an upsurge in participation among Francophones and a marked increase in participation among Anglophones. People are coming back.

Why do you think that is?

The upswing, in my opinion, can be explained on the one hand by better communication throughout the diocese. The faithful from all over the diocese are more aware of the pilgrimage. And that this is not just the Francophone event that it was for many years.

In addition, many newcomers are now attending – Vietnamese, Eritreans, Hispanics. In their respective cultures, there is a strong tradition of Marian devotion. When they

arrived in Manitoba, these groups realized that there was a pilgrimage, and wanted to participate. *Let's rent a bus and let's go!*

It seems that there is a new appreciation of Marian devotions...

Overall, yes. There's an uplift of interest throughout the Church, and a re-reading of the place of Mary in our faith. The Second Vatican Council put a greater emphasis on Christ and the Paschal mystery, and rightly so since they are at the heart of our faith. The adjustment was necessary. Before, there were so many devotions to the saints and so much devotion to Mary that in the end the focus on Christ and the Paschal mystery was diminished.

In the half-century since the Council, a new balance has been established. We appreciate Mary and the saints, but with a new perspective. The saints and we all form a great family. And we all have our eyes set towards Christ.



Marian devotions to the Oblate novitiate of St. Norbert in 1952.
Photo: St. Boniface Historical Society.

So, the great family of the Church of St. Boniface will meet in Saint-Malo on August 18...

That's right! Pilgrimage is an integral part of the faith life of our diocese. And that is why we came to a formal decree. The idea was initially proposed by a couple of people. I

then invited the Diocesan Council of Priests to discuss it, to find out whether or not there was a need. The priests then discussed the issue in their respective deaneries. The conclusion was that an official diocesan pilgrimage could enhance our faith, our spiritual life and Mary's place in our collective and individual Christian commitment.

I then drafted the official decree with the support of the Diocesan College of Consultors, the senior college within the diocese. It is now official and a law for the life of the diocese.

What changes with the official decree?

The pilgrimage is now a highlight in the life of the diocese, such as the Feast of Saint Boniface on June 5, or the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8. From now on, all diocesan priests will invite their parishioners to the pilgrimage in a more proactive way. They will encourage participation and facilitate participation, which could increase interest in the pilgrimage and encourage even more of the faithful to attend.

As well, instead of simply announcing the event in the parish bulletin, priests will be invited and encouraged to cancel one of their parish masses so as to give their flock the chance to go to St. Malo. This will also make the priests available to concelebrate the Eucharist, and very importantly, hear confessions.

Reconciliation is a key element of a pilgrimage...

Indeed. At pilgrimages in Saskatchewan, I saw many people lining up to confess. This was even though there were many priests available. In the context of a pilgrimage, the sacrament of Reconciliation is seen as an invitation and opportunity for ongoing conversion. We ask forgiveness of the Lord and then, through the Eucharist, we reaffirm our faith in Him.

It's an ancient Christian tradition, which goes back to the Church of the first centuries, to link pilgrimage and reconciliation, yes?

Definitely. In Brittany, in France, a pilgrimage is even called a Pardon! I'd go even further than that. In all the great spiritual traditions, we see a similar ritual being enacted. During the summer, when the Church of St. Boniface has its pilgrimage to St. Malo, Aboriginal people will be organizing many powwows.



A Marian pilgrimage at Fort Alexander in 1957. Photo: St. Boniface Historical Society.

There is a very strong need in humans to leave home, to get out of their usual routine, to go and do something special in a space set apart. The Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes is a place set apart for the Lord. A place for the Lord and the

Virgin Mary, at a time set apart for prayer, for conversion and for meeting the Lord.

And, a place and time to get together as a family of believers. At World Youth Day, surrounded by a throng of other young believers, a young person can say, *Well I'm not alone. There are millions more!*

The same thing can occur at the diocesan level. So, a pilgrimage is a family meeting, a gathering of the whole diocese around the Virgin Mary and Jesus. As a Church, we gather around what we all care most about – our devotion to Mary as we all look to Christ.

(1) Annual Diocesan Pilgrimage at the Grotto of Notre Dame de Lourdes in St. Malo – August 18, 2019

English Mass will be held at 9AM (French Mass: 11AM). Confession before both masses. Followed by breakfast served by the K of C (Free will offering). To view poster, [click here](#)