

SAINT ANNE *Catholic Church*



November 2018

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When she was very young, Mary Suddath watched *The Song of Bernadette* with her father, and it made a marvelous impact on her impressionable heart. Through the story of St. Bernadette, the Blessed Mother touched Mary's soul in a way that remained with her for the rest of her life.

"Watching this movie was very instrumental in my desire to visit Lourdes," Mary says. "After surviving cancer in 2011, I felt a strong pull to make that dream a reality. I began searching for pilgrimages to Lourdes and found an article about the North American Lourdes Volunteers [NALV]. They host a medical conference every year that discusses all aspects of the pilgrimage. After attending the 2017 conference in Miami, I knew that is was the right pilgrimage for me. It combined the



Getting ready for the candlelight Rosary procession

two loves of my life — my Catholic faith and my career as a pediatric ICU nurse."

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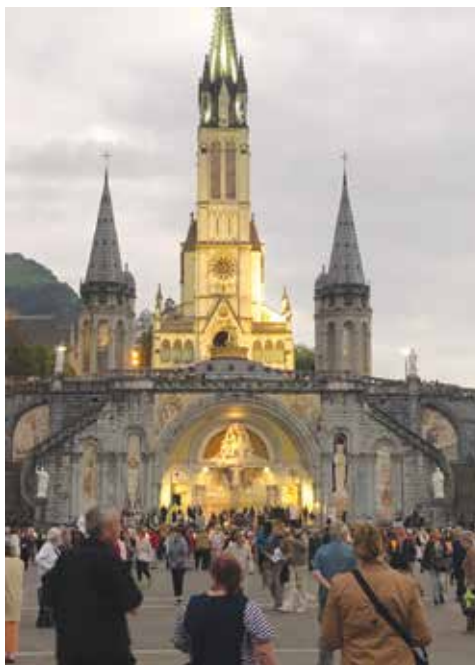
DISCOVERING THE BLESSED MOTHER'S LOVE

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Over the years, Mary has developed a beautiful friendship with Our Lady of Lourdes, as well as with the NALV. In October 2017, she led a group of our parishioners on a Virtual Lourdes Pilgrimage through the ministry of the NALV. During the pilgrimage, they learned more about St. Bernadette and the apparitions of the Blessed Mother at Lourdes. They were also able to receive some of the same profound spiritual graces that pilgrims journeying to the holy site of Lourdes usually receive. For example, they laid their hands on rocks and water from the Lourdes Grotto and received a powerful Eucharistic blessing. They also had the opportunity to participate in a candlelight procession and Rosary, which is one of the traditions Lourdes pilgrims often enjoy. Overall, it was an inspiring experience for all who attended, one that reminded them that Our Lady is a “safe haven” in the midst of life’s hardships.

“Marian devotion has always been a mainstay of our Catholic faith, but it is particularly important in light of the recent ‘summer of suffering’ in the Catholic Church,” Mary says. “Our Lady calls us to Lourdes to bring us closer to her Son, in Whose Sacred Heart we find great peace. Pilgrims return from Lourdes refreshed and renewed in their faith and deeply touched by their experiences at the Grotto.”

Now as an official ambassador for North American Lourdes Volunteers, Mary will continue to be a blessing to St. Anne’s in many ways, bringing



The Immaculate Conception Basilica

the serene, healing touch of Our Lady into the heart of our faith community. As the contact person for our parish, she will be speaking after all of the Masses on Dec. 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and be present at an information table in the narthex afterwards. She will be available to answer questions and make referrals to the appropriate contacts if someone wishes to sign-up for a pilgrimage to Lourdes.

“I remember what Fran [the Virtual Pilgrimage guide] told me after she came to our parish last October, ‘Many graces will come to your parish after this pilgrimage,’”

Mary says. “Since then, we have gained a new priest and a full-time DRE. Further, one of our female parishioners entered the Carmelite Order and two of our young people served as NET missionaries.”

Furthermore, Special Needs Pilgrimages are available in June and October. People can join these pilgrimages as part of the medical team (whether active or retired), as a pilgrim, or as a caregiver or companion. All pilgrims, as well as the medical team and volunteers, are invited to enjoy the spiritual blessings that Lourdes has to offer by participating in the candlelight Rosary procession, the International Mass at the Underground Basilica, the Baths and the Eucharistic Procession. They can also visit the Grotto and go to daily Mass. Each June, NALV brings youth ages 14 to 17 and young adults ages 18 to 24 to serve special-needs pilgrims from the United States who journey to Lourdes.

To find out more about the Special Needs Pilgrimages or this ministry in general, visit www.lourdesvolunteers.org or call 315-476-0027. You may also contact Mary Suddath at 912-655-6147.