

THE CHURCH OF SAINT AGNES

HOLINESS + HOSPITALITY + HELPING + HEALING

March 19, 2021

Board of Adjustment
City of Park Hills
Park Hills, Kentucky

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to you in support of the “Mary Grotto Project” of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, and Roman Catholic Parish of the Diocese of Covington. My parish, Saint Agnes, is located in Fort Wright and I am a resident of Fort Wright, so I am writing not as a constituent of any representative at your meeting to consider the Mary Grotto Project. I write to you as the pastor of parish in the area whose experience with a Mary Grotto of our own might be helpful to you and perhaps ease any apprehensions you may have.

I begin by relating to you that Saint Agnes Parish has a Saint Mary Grotto, located to the east of the church, in the area in front of the rectory. It is quite visible from Dixie Highway. This grotto has been on the parish property for decades. It used to be behind the rectory, but was moved to its present location when additions were made to our school building in the 1980's. While normally illuminated with blue lights (blue is a color associated with Mary), since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic we have illuminated the grotto with green lights, which in Kentucky have become a symbol of hope for an end to this pandemic. I've noticed many porch lights on people's homes (including my mother's in Louisville, Kentucky) are also illuminated with green lights. I personally find this public show of solidarity comforting.

The Mary Grotto at Saint Agnes is a place where people take pictures with their children when they make their First Communion. We have our pet blessings on the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi in front of the grotto. Occasionally persons stop and pray there. I personally like the fact that our grotto is quite visible to persons as they drive, walk or bike down Dixie Highway. It is a visible sign (sacramental?) and reminder of God's presence and providence in our lives. I find it very comforting and would think that most people do as well, particularly during this pandemic.

Request for prayers from Saint Mary during times of pandemic or even plagues are part of our Christian/Catholic history. The beautiful church, *Basilica Sancta Maria Della Salute* (Saint Mary of Good Health) at the entrance to the Grand Canal in Venice, Italy was built by the people of Venice in the 17th century in thanksgiving for the lifting of an outbreak of the plague. I point this out to illustrate that such practices are not new in Catholicism nor unique to Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Park Hills.

As it happens, one of the significant apparitions of Mary at Lourdes occurred on March 25, which is the Feast of the Annunciation, which the Catholic Church will observe next week. In the Catholic Tradition, this feast, nine months before Christmas, recalls the event described in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1, verses 26-38, where the Angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she is to be the mother of Jesus. For her part, Mary communicates her willingness to cooperate with this plan of God in the Salvation History of the human race.

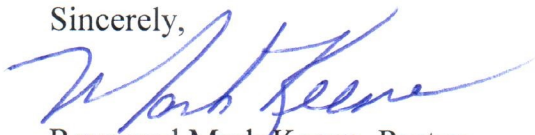
Obviously, Our Lady of Lourdes Parish is named for (under the patronage of) Mary in honor of her apparitions at Lourdes in France. This sight in France has become a pilgrimage site for many persons, but particularly for persons seeking healing of various kinds. Apparently many such requests/prayers for healing have been heard and granted. I point this out to demonstrate that the presence of a Mary Grotto is a sign of something comforting and uniting and even healing.

The presence of a Mary Grotto at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Park Hills and what I understand will be the landscaping of the grounds around it should render it at the very least a place of quiet, recollection and comfort. Such places, dedicated to these purposes are increasingly rare today. It seems to me that this could be something of a blessing and source of blessing to the people of Park Hills, much as our Mary Grotto has been for Saint Agnes. I believe this would be true for persons of any religious persuasion, or no particular religious persuasion at all for that matter. I understand that the scale of the Mary Grotto being considered is larger than the grotto at Saint Agnes, but would be modeled after the grotto in Lourdes, France and located toward the back of the parish property, away from the road.

What sort of impact a Mary Grotto may have on traffic, etc. in Park Hills is anyone's guess at this time I suspect. I don't know that it would be any more significant than Devou Park and its golf course, or the Behringer--Crawford Museum, or our Lady of Lourdes Parish itself, which is a non-territorial "personal parish" in our Diocese of Covington.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for taking my observations into account in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mark Keene", written in a cursive style.

Reverend Mark Keene, Pastor
Church of Saint Agnes
Fort Wright, Kentucky