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All About Mary

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All About Mary : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Monday October 15, 2018

All About Mary

By Eric F. Spina

World class.

As I wandered through the Marian Library's 75th anniversary exhibit earlier this month, I marveled at the size and scope of the collection. The phrase "world class" is bandied about too frequently, but there's simply no other way to describe this one-of-a-kind library.

Where else can you find the world's largest dedicated collection of books and artifacts on Mary, the mother of Jesus? The Marian Library's eclectic holdings feature rare books, stamps, clippings, holy cards, postcards, statues, rosaries, sheet music, art, nativities — and even wine bottle labels.

The library attracts scholars and the curious, Mary aficionados and pop culture lovers. It's a treasure trove of all things Mary.

Located off the beaten track on the seventh floor of Roesch Library, it represents more than our Marianist roots. It animates who we are as a Catholic, Marianist university, one with a special devotion to Mary.

As I gazed at a collection of statues in display cases, I realized I've never seen more diverse depictions of the Blessed Virgin. A Japanese Madonna with rosary pearls. A Mexican portrayal of Mary with child. A carved-wood Polynesian Madonna. A Chinese ceramic sculpture of the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus.

In another room, I admired an intricate Pueblo nativity scene from New Mexico, one of more than 3,600 nativities from around the world that are loaned for local displays and exhibited in offices around campus during the Advent and Christmas seasons.

And then there are the books, more than 112,000, of which 12,000 are considered rare. Published in 1473, the collection's oldest printed book, *Sermones aurei de sanctis* by Leonardus de Utino, includes Latin sermons with some Italian poetry. I discovered that a dozen of the library's rare books were printed before 1500, and several of the oldest are handwritten.

In typical Marianist fashion, the collection began simply — and humbly — with a gift of one book, *Devotion to Mary in the 20th Century*, by Marianist priest John Elbert.

The collection now stretches across miles of shelving, housing such rare finds as *The Song of Bernadette* in 13 translations, including one autographed by author Franz Werfel. And here's an astounding fact: more than 40,000 of its books cannot be found in any other American library.

For scholars researching Marian shrines, the 8,000-volume Leon Clugnet collection is a go-to resource, with the vast majority of that rare collection only available in our library. But researchers and Mary devotees don't have to travel to Dayton, Ohio, to learn more about Mary. They can tap into the library's popular virtual encyclopedia, [All About Mary](#), for a wealth of resources at their fingertips.

The Marian Library is not a tourist spot, though its acclaim is international. It's not a monument, but, rather, an extraordinary collection of material on Mary that crosses the centuries and spans the globe.

It's simply world class.

(The celebration of the Marian Library's 75th anniversary continues with a free performance by the Marian Consort, an internationally renowned early music vocal ensemble, at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 18, in the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception. Details [here](#).)