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## Hail Mary!

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# Hail Mary! : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Monday October 9, 2023

## Hail Mary!

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By Eric F. Spina

Until I became president, I didn't realize that the University of Dayton's Marian Library held the world's largest collection of material about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Even more than the Vatican!

The Marian Library turns 80 on Oct. 20, and this *grande dame* has never looked finer — or engaged more audiences with its sacred and eclectic treasures. It's fitting that oak traditionally marks an 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. For me, the Marian Library is like the mighty oak tree with its strong roots and sturdy branches that look like outstretched arms. It's welcoming and awe-inspiring.

This is a library like no other. It's not just for scholars, and it's not just about books, though it does house an astounding 112,200 books in approximately 150 languages about the Virgin Mary, some dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

This summer, religious studies faculty and graduate students brought teens participating in the Wayfinders program to the library to explore their faith as they viewed depictions of Mary in art from around the world and examined rare books. In September a family from Kentucky made a stop to ask about the medieval traditions behind Mary Gardens because they wanted to create one at their home parish. And, just recently, Professor Jaro Bilocerkowycz and his political science students viewed the library's art exhibit depicting Ukrainian identity and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It's so gratifying for me to learn that the Marian Library has reached thousands of undergraduate students in the past year alone through class visits, student-curated exhibits and co-curricular programming.

"Historically, the Marian Library has served researchers and theologians worldwide, and still does," said Kayla Harris, recently promoted to director. "Today, though, we're serving more faculty and students than ever before. In the last academic year, 600 students visited the Marian Library for instruction visits and hands-on interaction with the collection, and more than 4,000 participated in co-curricular programs, such as a tour of Marian statues across campus.

Kayla is seeing a surge in cross-disciplinary interest in Mary. It's reflected in contemporary photos of Los Angeles street art of Our Lady of Guadalupe and other artistic representations of Mary through the lens of various cultures and religions. Visitors will still glimpse traditional images of Mary with the baby Jesus, but the library also houses shelves of white, Black, Hispanic, African and Asian statues — and even "a representation of Mary as a radical figurehead for social justice." Throw in 30,000 Marian postcards, 10,000 holy cards, 9,000 stamps, 3,600 nativity sets, 700 pieces of sheet music, an alarm clock, a rosary scented with roses, and wine bottle labels, and there's something for both the curious and the devotees.

The Marian Library may be tucked away on the top floor of Roesch Library, but its outreach is worldwide. Last year the staff answered nearly 800 inquiries about Mary — from miracles and apparitions to spirituality and devotion. Scholars from around the globe visit the collection.

The Marianists bring people to Jesus through Mary, and no place does it better than this world-renowned center devoted to all things Mary.

Hail Mary!

*(Photo credit: Ann Zlotnik, Marian Library. Please join me on Oct. 20 and wish the Marian Library a happy 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on social media. Be sure to tag the Marian Library on Facebook, X, and Instagram.)*