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Modeling Mary

07.23.2007 | Catholic, Campus and Community, Fine Arts  On the feast that marks the Blessed Virgin Mary's passage into heaven (the Assumption), the University of Dayton will dedicate a new 11-foot bronze statue that places her in the front and center of student life.

The statue of Mary at the Feast of Cana will be blessed and dedicated at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 15, on the northwest lawn of Marianist Hall, UD's newest student residence hall. The ceremony is open to the public.

"The statue is a joint effort with the University of Dayton, with the American Society of Ephesus providing the funds," said Joe Quatman, a 1938 UD graduate who wanted to help the University erect a prominent statue of Mary. His family founded the society -- named for the city in Turkey where Mary, accompanied by the apostle John, is believed to have traveled late in her life -- to restore and preserve important burial places and tombs of saints.

"The campus needs something to define it as a Christian university based on the Catholic faith. You can walk past the chapel on campus and not go in. But you can't walk past the statue and not see it," said Quatman, who worked with members of the Society of Mary (Marianists), the religious order that founded UD, in choosing the statue's design and location.

Artist Robert Lepo of Lepo Works studio in Lima, Ohio, created and cast the nearly one-ton statue that portrays Mary in the context of the wedding at Cana.

According to the Gospel, when the wine at the wedding feast ran short, Mary asked Jesus to assist, calling the wine servers to "Do whatever He tells you." That exhortation, a key element of Marianist spirituality, is inscribed on the statue base, along with the Scripture reading describing the wedding at Cana, from John 2:1-11.

"We see the statue as expressive of Marianist spirit and meaningful to the campus population," said the Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., director of the International Marian Research Institute at UD. "It's a depiction of Mary that is younger, active and more present."

A nearly 5-foot wine jar sits by Mary's left hand; her right hand beckons in a welcoming gesture, drawing the viewer closer. Mary's posture and hand gestures are intended, Roten said, "to establish a relationship, to draw people to her and send them forward."

"We Marianists also hope the statue will express Mary's warmth of hospitality and welcome," said the Rev. Bertrand Buby, S.M., UD professor emeritus of religious studies. "The symbols of the water and wine are those of baptism and the Eucharist. These are two of the (rituals) by which many of our students identify themselves."

The statue will stand at a busy crossroads of student pedestrian traffic -- close to the bookstore, credit union, a food emporium, the Chapel of the Marianist Martyrs and the RecPlex. "It's a social location that's very Marianist," Buby said.

"The priests and Mr. Quatman wanted the students to be able to see Mary as an actual person," said Robert Lepo, who with his brother David owns Lepo Works and creates private, public and corporate art for clients throughout the country. The brothers worked previously with the Quatman family to restore the Lady of Fatima statue at Russells Point, Ohio.

The artists began pouring the bronze for the UD statue in May, casting 108 parts that were then welded together like quilt pieces. The arms of the statue alone weigh about 130 pounds apiece. After being coated with patina and sealed, the statue will be delivered to campus in late July and installed on a low granite pedestal. The gift of the statue, pedestal and site preparation are valued at $150,000.

"Students passing by the statue will understand the story and recognize it from the Bible," said David Lepo. "If not, it will cause them to ask questions, which is probably what the University wants."

Contact the Rev. Bertrand Buby, S.M., at 937-229-3286 or Regis Lekan at 937-229-2903.