

More than a Decoration

By Father Christian Mutombo and Lionel Demers



On the Feast of the Epiphany, Archbishop Albert LeGatt blessed the new Marian shrine at Saints-Martyrs-Canadiens parish. A space that enables the faithful to venerate the Mother of Christ even more.

*Interviews by Daniel Bahuaud,
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It was in 2022 that Father Christian Mutombo first suggested to the parishioners that the statue of the Virgin Mary, which had stood at one end of the church for almost 20 years, be given greater prominence. “The statue didn't attract people to pray. Many people didn't even notice it. Yet Mary is the mother of Jesus, the Mother of God and the Mother of all Christians. I thought she should be given more space.”

Lionel Demers was immediately on board. The carpenter explains: “The moment Father Christian mentioned it, one Sunday morning, I quickly took out my parish bulletin and drew up a few ideas. I couldn't help myself! Mary has a very special place in my heart. I've been praying my rosary since I was a child. And when we got married, my wife Chantale and I gave roses to Mary. Our devotion grows daily in our spirituality as a couple, and that of our family.”

An ad hoc committee was quickly formed, and ideas put to parishioners via a survey. Many ideas were put forward,” says Father Christian Mutombo. First, we proposed a budget of \$10,000. But we didn't want anything too grandiose. The budget was revised downwards to \$3,600.



The result? Without changing its place in the church, the statue has become a veritable place of prayer. Some people even asked me where we'd found such a beautiful statue!," notes Lionel Demers. "The difference all comes down to the wooden frame, which echoes the church's woodwork and the shape of its nave. That, and Anthony Chiarella's mosaic, whose colors, notably blue and white, evoke Mary. Red and yellow are also reminiscent of the Holy Spirit, not to mention the church's stained glass windows.

“I’m happy with the result and with the few weeks I spent making the setting,” he continues. But the most important thing is that the beauty of the sanctuary invites prayer. Religious art is not simply decorative, but has a function to elevate the spirit. Our churches have the same function. They are spaces that take us out of our everyday lives. We retreat there to meditate, pray, reflect - in short, to talk to God. And now, we can better talk to Our Lady. That’s the whole point. The shrine and its statue inspire us to approach Mary spiritually. The statue represents this daughter of Israel who, with her “yes”, enabled the accomplishment of God’s promise to Israel. She is the mother of Israel’s king, the messiah, Jesus. And she is the mother of all mankind, since Jesus united all human beings to Himself.

Father Christian Mutombo agrees. “In our homes, we display photos of our family - our brothers, sisters, children and parents. It goes without saying that we do the same in our churches. The saints are members of our extended family of believers. In church, without distracting us from the tabernacle and altar where we worship the Lord, we have our sisters and brothers to whom we can turn with confidence. And especially Mary, our mother.

