Popes throughout the ages have encouraged the faithful to travel to shrines and holy sites. They know that our faith is enlivened when we travel with purpose and prayer to these hallowed places. Even the journey itself can be cleansing and renewing, as we leave our daily lives behind—if only for a few hours—and move from the secular to the sacred. Every step, every mile, can help us shed the weight of our daily lives.

December 8, 2019, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, marks the 140th anniversary of the dedication of The Miraculous Medal Shrine in Philadelphia. For the past 140 years, the Shrine has been a place where pilgrims can experience Our Lady, her beauty, and her grace. It is a fitting home for Our Blessed Mother and her Miraculous Medal, and people from around the world make pilgrimages to the Shrine, seeking countless graces through Our Lady’s intercession.

In a 2018 Vatican address to the International Conference of the Rectors and Pastoral Workers of Shrines (whose theme was “The Shrine: An Open Door to New Evangelization”), Pope Francis acknowledges these Marian graces: “Most of our shrines are dedicated to Marian piety. Here, the Virgin Mary opens the arms of her maternal love to listen to the prayer of each person and to fulfill it. […] Here Mary becomes the companion on the path of every person who raises their eyes to her asking for grace, certain it will be granted.”

In his short address, the Pope also reminded shrine leaders that these holy sanctuaries serve as both devotion and witness to the faith. “The shrine is a privileged place to experience mercy that knows no boundaries. […] In fact, when mercy is lived, it becomes a form of real evangelization, because it transforms those who receive mercy into witnesses of mercy.”

How the Shrine became a place to experience mercy is a storied journey, filled with divine providence, faithful stewards, and the impassioned efforts of the Vincentians, who are its guardians.

FROM A HUMBLE CHAPEL TO A GLORIOUS SHRINE
The Shrine didn’t begin as a shrine at all, but rather as a seminary chapel.

To accommodate a staggering increase in Vincentian vocations, the Congregation of the Mission purchased a plot of land in the Germantown section of Philadelphia, which would become St. Vincent Seminary in 1865. From a portion of this seminary, the Shrine would soon arise.

Vincentian seminarians moved from Missouri to Philadelphia in 1868 (in part because of the American Civil War), the same year the cornerstone of St.
The Shrine is a place where heaven touches earth. It is a place where people experience stillness, peace of mind, and serenity of soul.

FR. MICHAEL CARROLL, CM
DIRECTOR, THE MIRACULOUS MEDAL SHRINE