

Our Lady of Lourdes Responds...

By the Missionaries of Saint John the Baptist
July 2017-April 2021

Since the subject of building a Grotto into the hillside behind Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic church in Park Hills has once again caused some concern in our city, we hereby provide an ordered response to allay unnecessary fears and correct various misconceptions. Before addressing the issues raised, however, please consider these simple principles under which we have been operating.

In buying and renovating our church, we have followed the ordinances laid down both by the Church and the State. With due diligence, we have consulted the proper authorities and received all the proper permits to proceed. We contracted with respected architects and construction contractors. We will do the same with regard to the construction and operation of our future Grotto. Thus, we have engaged well respected architects, Elevar Design Group.

In renovating our church, great care was given to each and every part. Much effort, time and funds were expended to make the church presentable and beautiful, pleasing to all who have taken the time to visit. Much of this was accomplished in keeping with the present architecture of the church. We did not try to make it something other than what it was—English neo-gothic. Again, this same care and effort will be spent in the construction of our future Grotto, all to make it fit its location and purpose.



Now to the issues that have been raised. We have found them to be essentially eight in number.

1 Concerns have been cited at City Council meetings, in emails, and on social media sites regarding a potential increase in traffic stemming from the Grotto. At least three reasons have been given for this increase of traffic: (i) There will be an apparition of some kind causing many to flock to Park Hills, flood the streets with cars and even buses. Previous events in Cold Spring, KY were given as a

precedent; (ii) A miracle will take place. (iii) The Missionaries of Saint John the Baptist (MSJB) will promote this Grotto as a pilgrimage site.

Our Response:

Will there be an “apparition”?

To our knowledge, there are no approved apparitions at any established Grotto world-wide. As was rightly pointed out in the city council meeting of Feb 27, 2017, wherein the Grotto was first discussed, the events in Cold Spring (1995) had nothing to do with the Grotto near the church.

Additionally, the MSJB, being very traditional minded, are very reluctant to promote any apparition without the Church’s complete approval, something that can take decades to acquire.

Will there be a “miracle”?

As for the miracle, we are encouraged that people think one may actually happen at our future Grotto. For the record, although there are frequent miracles in Lourdes France (someone in Park Hills recently approached us explaining how his son was cured miraculously of a terminal illness at Lourdes France), to authenticate such a miracle takes many years. Again, the MSJB are very reluctant to say anything is an authentic miracle before due process, appropriate analysis and investigation by the Church authorities and the passage of time. Please consider viewing this short explanation of the work required behind declaring a miracle at Lourdes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgVnjJLarwk>

Once again, we are completely unaware of any Grotto like ours (one built in imitation of the Grotto in Lourdes France) located anywhere in the world as being a site of apparitions or miracles. Instead, these little imitation caves were constructed to be places of prayer... places where people can light a candle and sit in prayerful silence, gazing upon Our Lady in the Niche, calling to mind that special place of miracles in Southern France. Please, let’s not confuse the two. And, what is more, anyone who knows the MSJB will dismiss out of hand as calumny any rumor or talk that we would manufacture miracles or apparitions of any kind.

Will there be an increase of traffic?

There are no special “Grotto events” planned or foreseen that would conflict with the normal use of the church. Thus, it is not envisioned that any traffic generated by the Grotto would exceed that of the normal Sunday or Holy Day Masses at Our Lady of Lourdes. As anyone working with the MSJB at Our Lady of Lourdes, the priests are plenty busy now and are not looking for any extra work.

We called one of the popular shrines of Our Lady in the USA—Our Lady of Snows in Bellevue, IL—located not far off I-64 (<https://snows.org/sacred->

[spaces/lourdes-grotto/](#)). Among many other things of interest, they have a large and realistic Lourdes Grotto. Apart from certain special events, the normal daily traffic of pilgrims to this Grotto is estimated to be about 50 persons. Please note that this is a national shrine that has many attractions, not just a Lourdes Grotto. Will our future Grotto attract that many? It seems a stretch to think it will. With all the grottos located in the greater Cincinnati area and Northern Kentucky, of which there are not a few, to date there are no reports of clogged roads due to these grottos. As one resident of Park Hills has pointed out: Northern Kentucky “has a replica tomb of Christ ... and the residents of the region remain safe from hoards of visitors.” Others have pointed out that the various events of Devou Park often cause traffic issues in Park Hills, but they are allowed to continue and even are encouraged.

Additionally, please consider viewing the live feed of the beautiful Grotto at Our Lady of Lourdes in Miami, Florida. You will see a peaceful, prayerful spot with very little activity.

See: <http://www.ololourdes.org/Church/CatholicChurch.php?op=Live>

What is more, for those who think a religious site such a grotto will be a tourist attraction, the State of Kentucky defines a tourism attraction here: KRS -

<https://apps.legislature.ky.gov/law/statutes/statute.aspx?id=43428>

Clearly a religious shrine does not fall within this definition. Please note there will be no refreshments served or entertainment given at our Grotto. Once again, the Grotto is simply a compliment to the church as a place to pray and reflect.

Will there be a parking problem?

We are not expecting any additional traffic other than what is normal for daily Mass. Religion is in decline all across our country. It seems quite unrealistic to think that building a simple Grotto will suddenly attract streams of people. All across our country, the Grottos remain quiet and reflective places... not tourist attractions.

In conclusion, we want to make clear that our objective here is simply to provide a place for people to pray in peace... to light a candle and enjoy the sound of water flowing, beautiful scenery in an environment that elevates the mind and heart to things eternal.

2 It has been said the proposed Grotto is too big for its location.

Our Response:

Will the structure be big and out of place?

As is the case with the traffic and parking issue, the imagination has some carried away with huge structures that are not according to reality. All that is planned is in proportion to the church, the hill, and the parking lot. In a word, it fits in its proposed location. Please note that we did indeed listen to earlier concerns and altered our design accordingly.

A similar example might be seen here in this Grotto of Belfast, Ireland. Notice how the existing Grotto (which is a little larger in size as compared to the one we are proposing) is not out of proportion to the church or its environment when viewed from the street. This will be our goal as well. What is more, due to the arrangement of Amsterdam Road, the church and the rectory buildings, those driving up or down the street will only have a brief window wherein the Grotto will become visible.



Will the statues used be giant in size?

The statues we have for our proposed Grotto are not very large. The statue of Our Lady of Lourdes stands a mere 4 feet, 10 inches. The statue of Bernadette is only 2 feet tall!! These statues are not “gigantic”.

We have listened to the concerns of the neighbors. Please note the difference between the previous Llambi design and the new design by Elevar. Keep in the mind the statues are modest, and thus, the Grotto will be made proportionate to the statues.

Is the revised Grotto bigger or even as big as the previous design?

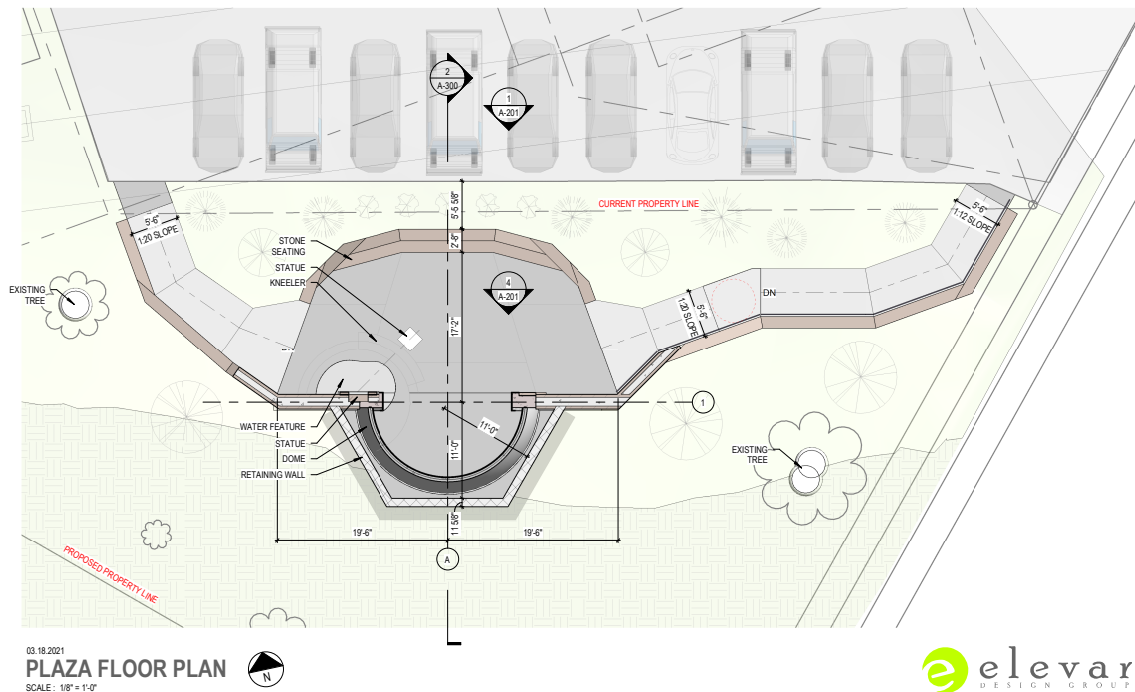
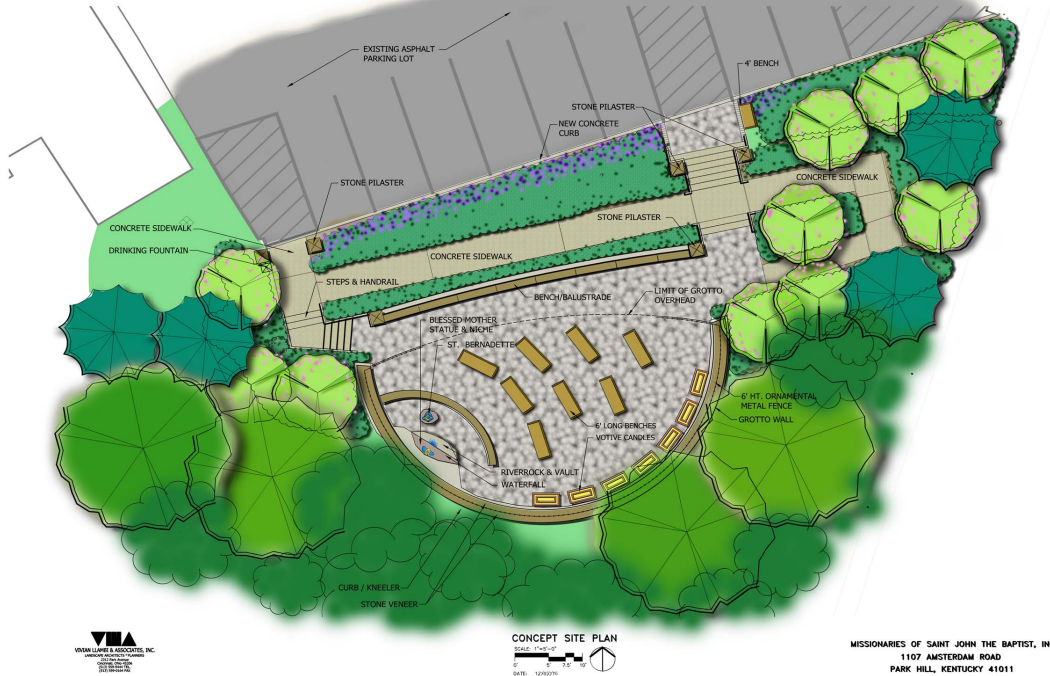
Let's compare a few drawings from Llambi 2017 and Elevar 2021.

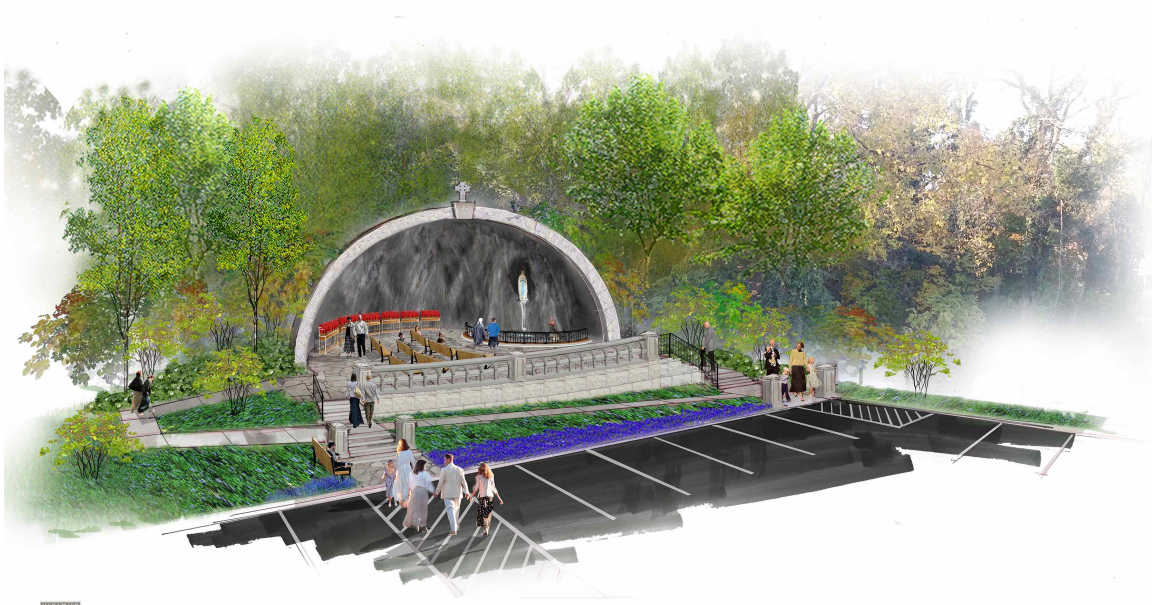
Some things to note:

- The previous proposal was 6 parking places wide, while the revised one is only 4 parking places wide at most.
- The dome for Llambi model covered the majority of the plaza, while the dome for the revised design is 10 feet in radius.
- The previous model is much higher up the hill. No stairs are needed to reach the revised model.
- To gain perspective, be sure to note the difference in the Grotto size compared to the cars depicted before each proposal. When cars are parked in front of the revised Grotto, much of it will be covered up.

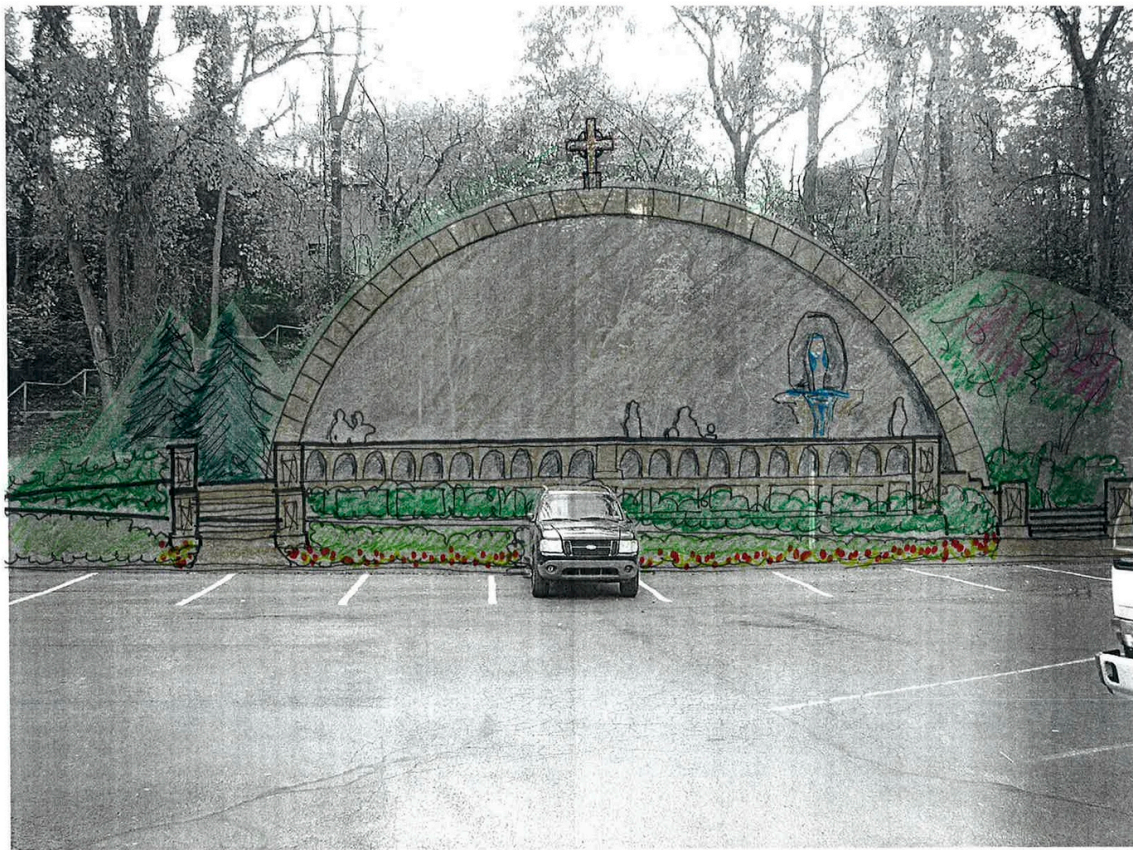
- Finally, no parking places are lost with the latest design whereas two were removed for the previous design.

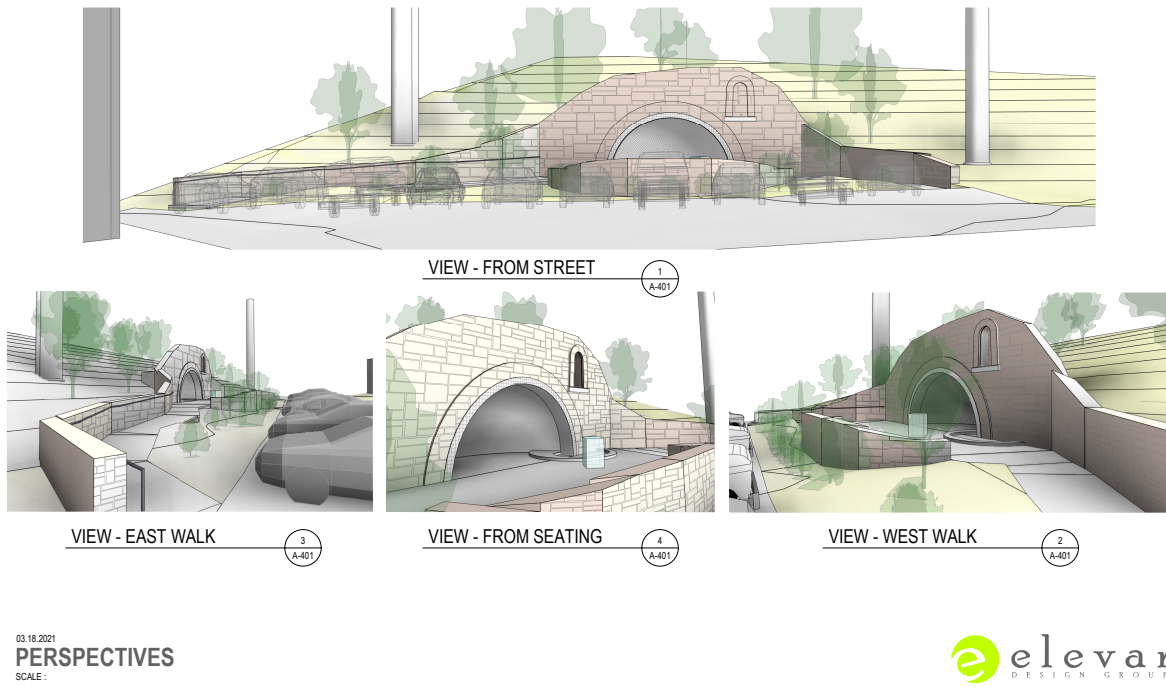
Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto





Llambi 2017





3 It has been said the proposed Grotto is not becoming for our area.

Our Response:

Will the Grotto be out of place in Park Hills?

We are making every effort to make the Grotto a structure that looks and feels appropriate to its environment. For example, we plan to use natural field stone native to this area. Be assured we want the rock structures to look natural along with many trees and plants and flowers.

4 It has been said that we do not need an outdoor Grotto. That if we want one, we should put it inside and not clutter up the hillside with such a site. It is said that the one at nearby St. Agnes is sufficient for us too.

Our Response:

Should Our Lady of Lourdes in Park Hills have an outdoor Grotto?

As it turns out, nearly every single Catholic institution in the Covington Diocese has some outdoor shrine or grotto like place of devotion. So, is the one church in

Covington Diocese named after Our Lady of Lourdes to be deprived of a Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes?

In 1858, Our Lady told St. Bernadette to have a chapel built there. Since that time there have been three main chapels built there, yet none of them encompass the Grotto itself. Although grottos are, at times, found inside some churches, ours is small and every space is used. The logical and reasonable place to build a grotto is outdoors on the natural hillside. We also ask how moving the Grotto to the inside would affect all the concerns about traffic?

The MSJB is making every effort to be respectful of the character of the city and its neighbors, while at the same time exercising its property rights just like any other owner (and just like Notre Dame, Covington Catholic and St Agnes).

5 It has been said that we cut down trees without cause.

Our Response:

Are trees being cut down without due cause?

The design of the proposed Grotto is enhanced by the presence of trees; especially those of size and age. The trees which were removed were dead – ash trees that had fallen victim to the Emerald Ash Borer. Using prudence and due diligence, we determined the dead trees posed a threat to people, parking lot, vehicles and those who use the stairs behind the church. Removing trees is expensive, but leaving dead trees standing near a parking lot is not responsible.

6 It has been said that music will be playing at the Grotto 24 hours a day.

Our Response:

Will there be music at the Grotto?

There is no sound system in the plans for this Grotto. There will be no music heard or played other than an occasional hymn or two (sung *a cappella*) when there may be a procession to the Grotto. As already indicated, the main objective in building this Grotto is to provide a place for people to pray in peace... to light a candle and enjoy the sound of water flowing, beautiful scenery in an environment that elevates the mind and heart to things eternal. These factors alone show how inappropriate canned music would be to such a sacred site. These factors also contribute to the size of the Grotto space... people should be given room to pray and think and meditate in peace.

7 It has been said that the Grotto will impact the hillside, possibly weakening the support for homes located above.

Our Response:

Will the hillside be affected badly by the building of our Grotto?

Once again, we have hired the reputable landscape architects, surveyors and geo-technical teams to study the hillside and take core samples to determine whether the hillside would be adversely affected by the construction of a grotto. The results from these studies have determined that there is no danger in building the proposed Grotto. In fact, the opposite may be true. Deep footers of the Grotto structure will rather strengthen the hillside! In any case, residents should be assured we are following all the structural and geotechnical recommendations on how to build such a structure without adversely affecting the surrounding area.

8 It has been said that the Grotto will impact the property values of all surrounding properties, even warding off potential purchasers who would otherwise have been interested.

Our Response:

Will property values be negatively affected by the Grotto?

This is pure speculation. Now that some years have passed since we came to Park Hills, the very opposite of this claim has come to true. The property values in our city have increased! Despite all the contention about our church and Grotto, houses in our neighborhoods are not having too much trouble selling at a fair market value.

Conclusion

The MSJB respects that not everyone in our area has devotion to the Blessed Virgin or is Catholic, but we would ask everyone to respect those who have this devotion and belief. As we have shown in the refurbishing of our church, we are interested in adding to the beauty of our city, providing people something to elevate their minds to higher realities. We have proven to be law-abiding residents, willing to work with local and state officials in matters under their purview..

Finally, we would like to reassure our neighbors that our Grotto will be designed and built according to the highest standards and under the guidance both of our bishop and the relevant local regulations.

May God reward you!