

A Renaissance Mary Garden

Planting hope in our homes with Mary



The logo for the Mary Garden Contest, featuring a small green leaf icon above the text "MARY GARDEN CONTEST" in a white box with a green border.

**MARY
GARDEN
CONTEST**

MUSEUMOFFAMILYPRAYER.ORG

Welcome to Our Family

In addition to longer days, sunshine, and school graduations, spring is time for a one-of-a-kind event: the Museum of Family Prayer's annual Mary Garden Contest. Gardeners, gardener "wanna-be's," and families young and old are invited to cultivate and care for gardens dedicated to the Mother of God.

What is a Mary Garden? Traditionally, it is an enclosed garden of flowers and herbs whose names speak of Our Lady. These gardens, which appeared in Europe as early as the Middle Ages, are typically planted around a statue of Mary, creating a peaceful space for prayer. Since we welcome gardens of all shapes and sizes, we hope you and your family will be creative as you plan your Mary Garden together and take this opportunity to begin or deepen a habit of family prayer.

You can learn more about this longstanding tradition, find practical advice for creating your own Mary Garden, and submit photographs of your work on the Museum of Family Prayer's website, MuseumOfFamilyPrayer.org.

As new life springs forth in creation, let us entrust our families to Mary, the Mother of Our Hope. May God bless you and your family!

A Little History

Venerable Patrick Peyton began his ministry in 1942 with the goal of building family unity through daily prayer of the Rosary. Inspired by his own father who had a deep appreciation for family prayer, praying the Rosary became the foundation for the life of Father Peyton (1909-92).

We at Family Rosary are ever so grateful Father Peyton's family instilled in him the importance of family prayer. Now it can be part of your family's tradition so you can fulfill Father Peyton's vision, "The Family That Prays Together Stays Together."



Family Rosary

HOLY CROSS
FAMILY MINISTRIES

The family that prays together stays together

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The Little Garden of Paradise

1410-20

Upper Rhenish Master

Germany

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In the Middle Ages, European Christians began dedicating their vegetable gardens to Mary, asking her to bless their crops. As more cathedrals, monasteries, and convents were built, gardens were expanded to include herbs and flowers. No longer just practical, these gardens were designed for the healing of the soul. A sanctuary of bright colors and wonderful smells was a perfect respite from a difficult medieval world. Christians began to identify specific flowers with Mary, and so Mary Gardens officially began.

The Little Garden of Paradise was painted around 1410, in the earliest days of the European Renaissance. The realistic people, lush colors, and the extreme attention to detail are all themes that dominated this great artistic period. By continuing the medieval tradition of gardens dedicated to Mary, this artist gives thanks to God by painting this work of art dedicated to Our Mother.

Since few people could read in the 15th century, artists used symbols and common themes in their artwork to tell a story. In this painting alone there are dozens of hidden messages, including some that have been forgotten over time. For example, Mary sits beside a table with a plate of apples and pitcher of water. This is a direct reference to Adam and Eve and the Forbidden Fruit. But Mary is the new Eve, and was conceived without sin, and so the apple on the table is now a harmless fruit.

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There are over twenty identifiable flowers and plants, including irises, lilies, violets, and roses. Fruit is ripe and plentiful in this garden of paradise, and we see a lush cherry tree and several strawberry bushes. Here in the garden, alongside Mary, there is no fear of hunger or starvation.

God's creatures are also present in the garden, including several songbirds who fill the air with music. The artist took great pains to depict each type of bird, including a goldfinch, oriole, and a robin. Each bird is also associated with the Christian faith; for example, the goldfinch is a symbol of Christ that is still used today. Goldfinches eat thistles and thorns, and so they are often associated with the Passion. A popular medieval legend featured a songbird who flew down and plucked a thorn from Christ's head. In doing so, the bird was splashed with Christ's blood, which is why many songbirds, like the Robin, have red feathers.

**On this mountain, the LORD of hosts
will provide for all peoples
a feast of rich food and choice wines,
juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.
On this mountain He will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples.**

Isaiah 25:6-7

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In the painting, the Virgin Mary is enjoying a day out in her garden, reading from a book of prayer. She relaxes on a cushion, her blue cloak draped over her knees; this is Our Lady of Modesty. Despite the crown she wears as Queen of Heaven, Mary is not sitting on a throne, but relaxes on the ground so that she may be nearer to mankind. By doing this Mary is inviting us to join her in the garden.

Beneath Mary, baby Jesus plays a musical instrument with a female saint. Jesus has a coin purse at His waist, referring to the thirty pieces of silver that would seal His fate. The woman beside Him could either be St. Catherine of Alexandria or St. Cecilia.

St. Catherine was a princess (identified by her crown) who converted thousands of people in her short life. She died a martyr proclaiming that her only husband was Christ. The woman could also be St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. She was also martyred for her faith and is usually depicted with a musical instrument. Both female saints took vows of chastity, consecrating their virginity to Christ and taking Him for their Spouse. Consecrated men and women continue this practice in the Church today.

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To the right of Jesus sit three men. The Archangel Gabriel, identified by his wings and crown, relaxes in the shade alongside St. Sebastian (standing) and St. George. The small, grumpy-looking creature by Gabriel's feet is the devil, now defeated and powerless. Also sitting on the ground is St. George, identified by the armor he wears. He too famously defeated the devil, which now lies beside him as a tiny, harmless dragon. Standing beside them is St. Sebastian, his pose mimicking his martyrdom. St. Sebastian was tied to a tree and shot with arrows, but instead of his wounds, a red scarf hangs over his body.

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On the left side of the garden is St. Dorothy. She is picking cherries from a tree, a fruit associated with the Crucifixion because of its tart flavor and red juice. When St. Dorothy was captured, the heathen King demanded she prove her connection to Christ. It was then her hat became filled with fresh fruit. An extremely popular saint during the Middle Ages, she is less well known today.

We know even less about the last woman in the painting. The female saint, who is ladling water from a well, has been lost to time. She could be St. Barbara, another popular medieval saint, but there are no recognizable symbols that tell us her identity.

Lastly, another reminder of Mary's purity is the walled garden itself. Since the earliest days of Christianity, Mary has been understood to be the New Eve, who, by cooperating with Jesus' redemptive work, undid the knots of Eve's disobedience. The walled garden is likewise a new Eden. Shielded forever from the sins of the outside world, Mary invites us all to join her.

**A garden enclosed, my sister,
my bride, a garden enclosed, a
fountain sealed!**

Song of Songs 4:12

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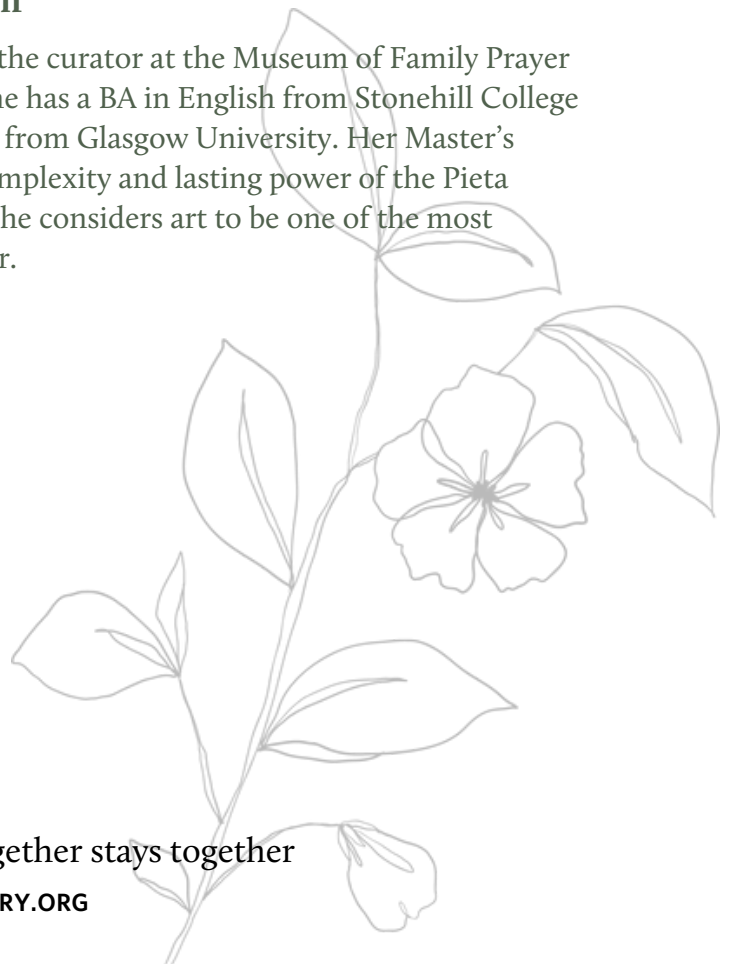
Continue the Journey

Want to learn more about Mary or explain to someone Mary's role in your faith? Catholic Central, a free video web series that talks about the big Catholic topics, has an episode all about Mary! There you'll learn that she's venerated, not worshiped; asked to pray for us; and makes occasional appearances to the faithful to achieve her one mission ... bringing people closer to her Son.



Caleigh McCutcheon

Caleigh McCutcheon is the curator at the Museum of Family Prayer in North Easton, MA. She has a BA in English from Stonehill College and a MA in Art History from Glasgow University. Her Master's thesis focused on the complexity and lasting power of the Pieta image in Christian art. She considers art to be one of the most powerful forms of prayer.



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Share your newly finished Marian Garden or your long-time Mary Garden. You've put a lot of work into it, now share that beauty with others. As you enjoy your garden, let it be a special place for your family to pray. Our family is one of our greatest gifts from God. Haven't ever prayed in a garden or as a family? Sounds uncomfortable? Give it a try. You'll be surprised how quickly it becomes comfortable. Or, maybe you pray all the time? Head over to your Mary Garden the next time you need to pray. Whatever your situation, we have prayers to make it special.

Keep an eye on:

Family Rosary [@familyrosary.org](https://familyrosary.org)

Catholic Mom [@catholicmom.com](https://catholicmom.com)

Museum of Family Prayer [@museumoffamilyprayer.com](https://museumoffamilyprayer.com)

and on our Facebook and Instagram sites too!

#MaryGardenContest



Bringing Families Together In Prayer

We hope the time you've spent reflecting with this material has been enriching. Continue to pray with your family every day, wherever you are.

For additional online resources for family prayer including additional e-books and the mobile Rosary App, please visit our website at www.FamilyRosary.org.

This e-book and all our resources represent a culmination of Father Peyton's passion for family unity through prayer. We hope our services will enhance your family's prayer life particularly remembering Father Peyton's famous words, "The family that prays together stays together."

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