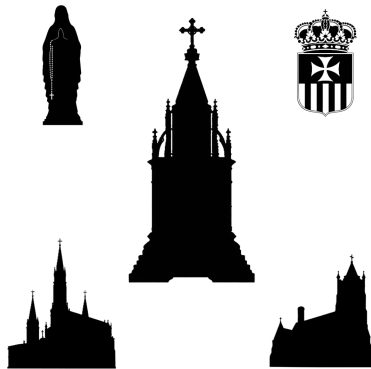


Our Lady of Lourdes Church and Parish

Founded in 1894 • Served by the Mercedarian Friars since 2004

**A brief history and guide to the church
in Historic Overbrook Farms, Philadelphia**



**Prepared for our guests
on the occasion of the
*St. Bernadette's National Relics Tour***

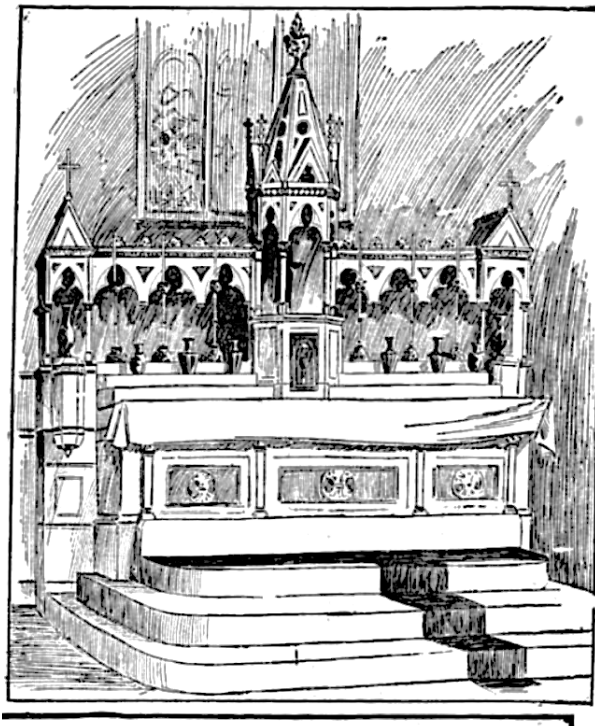


Welcome to Our Lady of Lourdes

The Catholic community of Overbrook built this church as a place of worship and prayer. Its stone walls, Grotto Chapel, and stained glass carry the faith of generations who gathered here for Mass, raised families, taught children, and served their neighbors.

Our parish bears the name of the Blessed Virgin Mary as she appeared to Saint Bernadette at Lourdes in 1858. In October 2026, we welcome the relics of Saint Bernadette to this Philadelphia parish. The visit invites us to look again at the story of Lourdes and at the people who made this church their spiritual home.

Pages 3–6 tell the parish story. Pages 7–11 guide you through the windows, including several that are easy to miss. You may read from beginning to end or carry the guide through the church at your own pace.



A Parish Takes Root

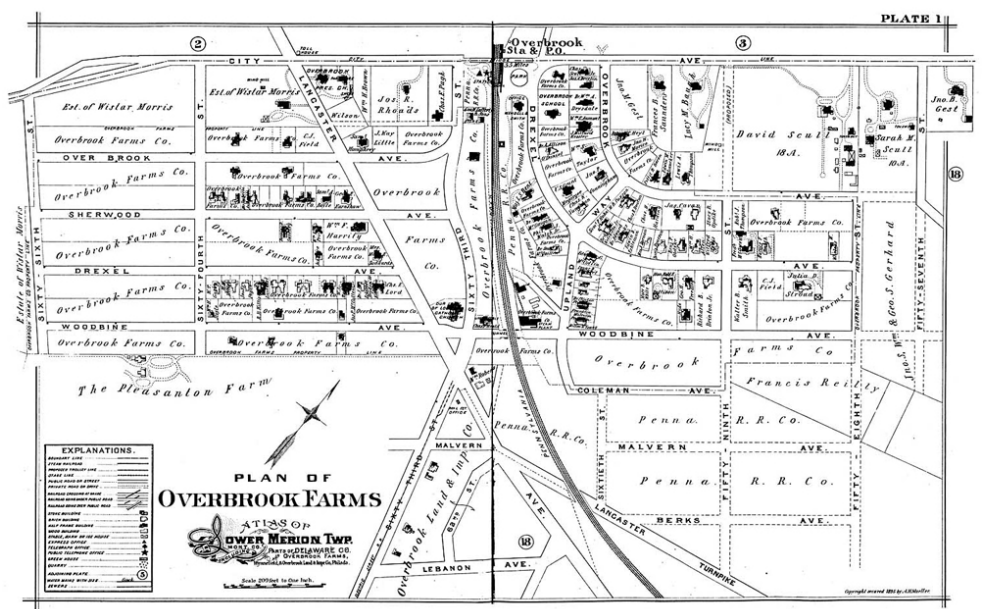
Overbrook Farms was being developed in the late nineteenth century when Catholic families and household workers found the journey to Our Lady of the Rosary difficult, especially in winter. They asked Archbishop Patrick John Ryan for a church closer to home. On April 14, 1894, he appointed Father James A. Mullin founding pastor of a new parish, initially designated Saint Mary Magdalene. Father Mullin was installed eight days later in the chapel of Saint Charles Borromeo Seminary, where the young parish worshiped during its first years.



Father James A. Mullin

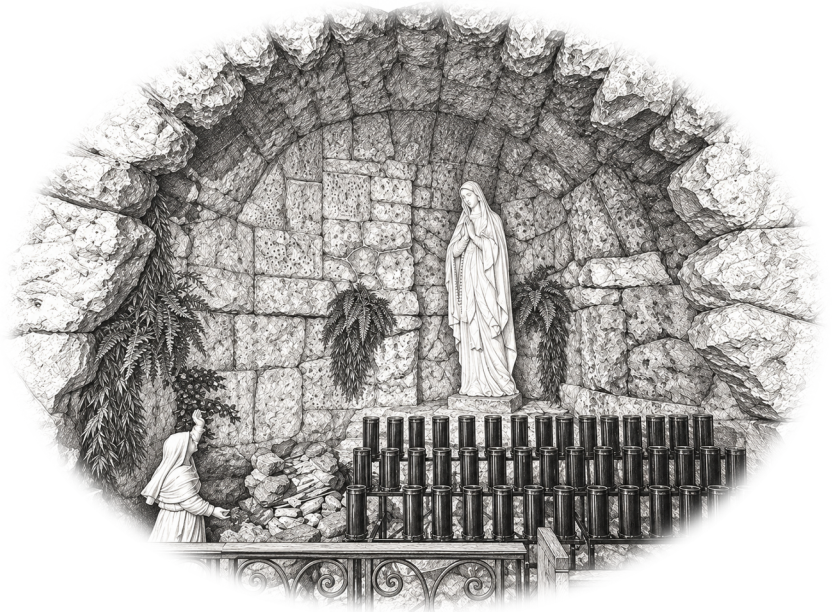
Father Mullin hoped to dedicate the church to Our Lady of Lourdes. A parish tradition tells how Hugh F. Sullivan offered \$2,000 for the building on the condition that it bear that title. The gift settled the question, and the Lourdes name was adopted in June 1894.

The seminary provided space, clergy, and practical help. Neighboring parishes contributed furnishings and funds. The founding community began with roughly sixty people at Father Mullin's installation; from that small gathering grew a parish that would serve Overbrook for more than a century.



Building the Church and Grotto

Architect Thomas P. Lonsdale designed a rural English Gothic church to harmonize with Overbrook Farms. Built of Port Deposit granite with limestone trim, it rose under builder Thomas Reilly. Ground was broken on October 22, 1894. The cornerstone was laid and the lower church dedicated on May 15, 1895. Archbishop Ryan dedicated the completed upper church on October 15, 1899.



The rectory followed in 1896. A bell named Ioannes Vocor—"I am called

John"—was blessed in 1898. In

1918, the lower church was remodeled and a Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes installed.

Archbishop Dennis J. Dougherty consecrated the upper church in the parish's silver jubilee year, 1919.

The Grotto brought the parish's title into its daily life. Pilgrims who cannot travel to France can still pray here beneath the image of Our Lady and remember Bernadette's call to prayer and conversion.

NEW CHURCH BELL

The new bell of the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes, at Sixty-third and Lancaster avenue, is being placed on the trestle work, and will be blessed on Sunday week by Bishop Prendergast. The bell is the gift of Edward T. Maguire, and is a memorial to his family. It will weigh 2300 pounds, and was cast by McShane & Co., of Baltimore. Work will be commenced on the main church in about two weeks, but will not be finished before eight or nine months. The entire interior of the main church will be renovated, plastered and seated. Among the handsome interior decorations will be several memorial windows.

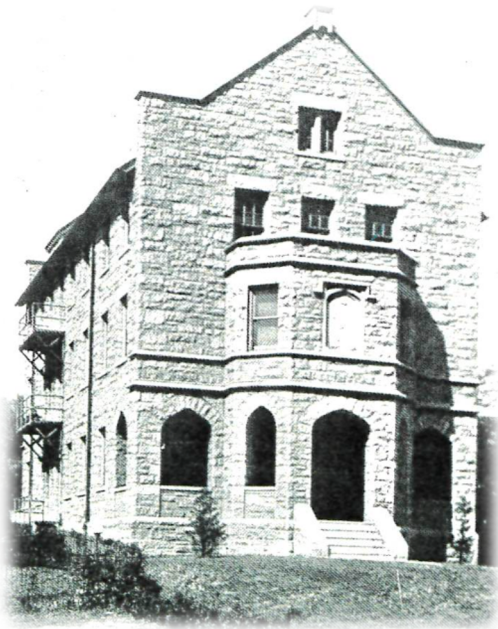
The new altars, three in number, will be of white Italian marble. These altars will be exceptionally elaborate and fine in finish, and gifts of members of the congregation. The entire surrounding and rails will be marble, and the gates at the approach will be brass. The entire alterations outside the gifts will cost \$25,000. The congregation since opening the church September 8, 1895, have been worshipping in the basement.

School and Neighborhood

The Sisters of Mercy began teaching catechism here in 1897. A parish school opened on October 5, 1908, with 78 pupils and Sister Mary Liaba, RSM, as its first principal. Archbishop Ryan blessed the building on October 18. Designed for a much larger enrollment, it became a center of parish life for generations of children and families.

A convent was completed in 1914. School growth brought four new classrooms in 1963–64 and four more by 1969. The school celebrated its centennial in 2008 and completed its final academic year in 2012. Its buildings continued to serve the neighborhood after classes ended.

The parish shared the burdens and joys of its neighbors. During the Second World War, 487 parishioners served in the armed forces and sixteen did not return. In 1994, Our Lady of Lourdes celebrated its centennial. Its history is measured as much in worship, teaching, and care for neighbors as in buildings and anniversaries.



Our Lady of Lourdes Convent
Today the Administrative Offices
of Ad Prima Charter School

The Parish Today

On August 7, 1976, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła visited the church, Grotto, and grounds during Philadelphia's International Eucharistic Congress. Two years later he became Pope John Paul II. His visit is one memorable moment in a much larger parish story.



In July 2004, the Archdiocese entrusted Our Lady of Lourdes to the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mercy, the Mercedarian Friars. Their vocation of mercy and their devotion to Our Lady gave a new expression to the parish's Marian identity. The Grotto Chapel became a place of perpetual Eucharistic adoration in 2005.

The school closed in 2012. In 2013, Our Lady of Lourdes, Saint Callistus, and Saint Donato were merged into a newly constituted parish bearing the Lourdes name. Father Michael Rock, O. de M., guided the parish through this transition until his sudden death in 2021. Father Matthew H. Phelan, O. de M., became pastor in 2022. Today the parish continues to worship, welcome pilgrims, and care for its historic church and grounds.



Father Matthew H. Phelan, O. de M.

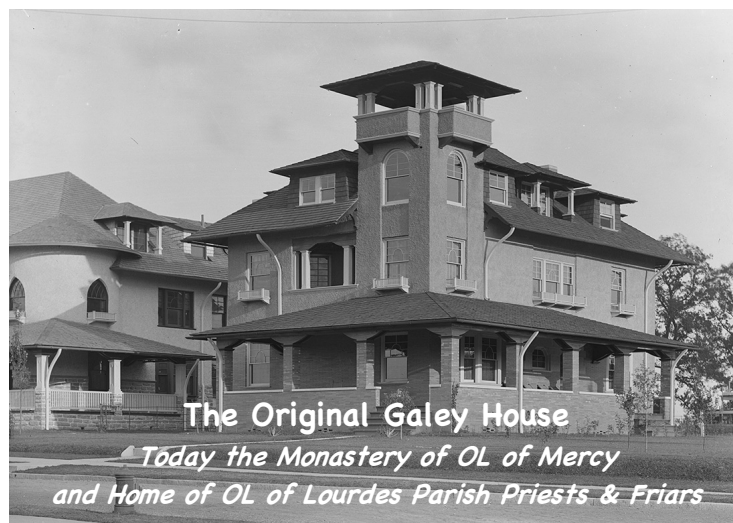
Reading the Windows

The windows tell more than one story. The Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Holy Family, Finding in the Temple, and Wedding at Cana follow Mary and Jesus from the Incarnation to the beginning of his public ministry. The Lourdes window gives the parish its particular identity. Other windows honor the Crucifixion, Saint Joseph, Saint Patrick, and the Sacred Heart.

Look closely at the lower borders. Donor inscriptions and memorial names preserve another layer of history: the people who gave these works to the church. The Annunciation window, for example, names Father James A. Mullin, the founding pastor.

The Nativity window reveals an unexpected connection. Its donors, Mr. and Mrs. William Galey, were early promoters of Overbrook Farms. Although they were not Catholic, members of later generations of the Galey family were baptized at Our Lady of Lourdes—some by Father Richard P. Phelan. Today, Father Matthew H. **Phelan**, O. de M., and the Mercedarian Friars reside in the Monastery of Our Lady of Mercy, the former William Galey residence.

Some glass is outside the main sequence. Page 11 points to the sacristies, the window behind the altar, the choir loft, and the front doors.



The Beginning of the Gospel

The Annunciation. Gabriel announces that Mary will bear the Son of God. Her assent begins the visible story of the Incarnation. The lower inscription commemorates Father James A. Mullin.

The Visitation. Mary brings Christ, still hidden in her womb, to Elizabeth. Their meeting is a scene of recognition, blessing, and joy.

The Nativity. Mary presents the newborn Jesus while Joseph, shepherds, and angels adore him. The angel above proclaims that the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.

These three windows invite us to see that God's saving work entered ordinary human life: a home, a journey, and a child born among the poor.



The Hidden Years and First Sign

The Holy Family. Jesus learns and works in the home of Mary and Joseph. The scene honors the years of family life that the Gospels recount only briefly.

The Finding in the Temple. After searching anxiously, Mary and Joseph find the young Jesus among the teachers. His words point toward the mission given him by the Father.

The Wedding at Cana. Mary notices the need of the wedding household and directs the servants to Jesus. His first sign reveals his glory and draws his disciples to faith.

Together these scenes trace a path from the quiet of Nazareth to the public signs of Christ. Mary is present both in the hidden years and at Cana.





Windows of Devotion

Our Lady of Lourdes. The Virgin appears in white above a spring, surrounded by angels. This window places the devotion for which the parish is named at the heart of the church's visual story.

The Sacred Heart. Christ reveals his Heart to Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque. Figures at either side recall the Visitation tradition associated with her life.

Saint Joseph and Saint Patrick. These individual windows honor the guardian of

Jesus and Mary and the missionary bishop associated with Ireland. Their donor inscriptions preserve parish memories as well as devotional subjects.



Look Again

The Crucifixion. The great sanctuary window centers the death of Christ, with Mary and the beloved disciple near the Cross. The scene draws the eye above the altar.

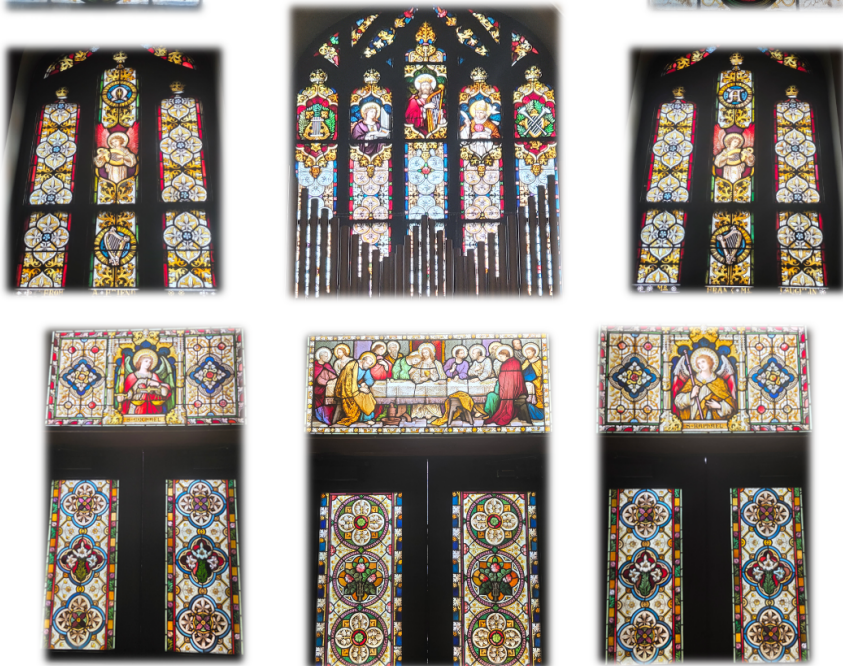


Sacristies and behind the altar. The Lamb, pelican, and Eucharistic imagery can be missed by visitors who remain in the nave. Their symbols turn attention to Christ's sacrifice and the Eucharist.

Choir loft. The central window brings together Saint Cecilia, King David, and Pope Gregory the Great—figures associated with the praise of God in music.



Front doors. The glass above and within the doors welcomes and sends forth those who enter the church. Pause to look back before leaving.



A Living Parish

1894 The parish is founded and named for Our Lady of Lourdes.

1899 The completed upper church is dedicated.

1908 Our Lady of Lourdes School opens.

1918 A Grotto is installed in the lower church.

1976 Cardinal Karol Wojtyła visits.

2004 The Mercedarian Friars assume pastoral care.

2013 Three parishes are united under the Lourdes name.

2026 The relics of Saint Bernadette visit Overbrook.

Parish sources

This guide draws on the parish history begun in 1969 and later expanded, the history of Our Lady of Lourdes School, and parish records of the Mercedarian years. The window descriptions accompany photographs of the glass in the church.

Our Lady of Lourdes Parish
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