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For Immediate Release

**Heart of French Saint Will Come to Long Island;
World-Famous Relic of Saint John Vianney
To Attract Throngs of Catholics in October**

MERRICK, NY—A relic revered by pilgrims around the world—the undecayed heart of a saint who died 147 years ago in France—is coming to Curé of Ars Church here on Long Island for five days of veneration and celebration by an expected multitude of Roman Catholics beginning October 7.

The heart of Saint John Vianney, the patron saint of parish priests, will leave France for only the second time. The first occasion was when it was taken to Rome for the saint's canonization in 1925.

The heart will be carried here by Bishop Guy Bagnard, bishop of Belley, Ars-France, who fulfilled the wish of Father Charles Mangano, the pastor of Curé of Ars in Merrick, which was the first church in the United States to be named after Saint John Vianney's church in Ars. The LI church is celebrating its 80th anniversary.

"I truly believe that this is God's doing," Father Mangano said. "Bishop Bagnard told me he decided to come here with the heart to increase vocations to the priesthood."

The celebration comes at a troubled time for the priesthood in the United States. The ranks of priests are diminishing and there has been scandal. Both Bishop Bagnard and Father Mangano are sensitive to the problems and hope the celebration of the life of one of the holiest priests will have a positive impact.

"I believe it's a time to celebrate and rejoice in the gift of the church and the priesthood. God has opened the doors for this to happen," Father Mangano said.

Saint Jean-Marie Baptiste Vianney, the Curé (curate) of Ars was born near Lyons, France in 1786, and died at Ars in 1859. When his body was exhumed in 1904 because of his pending beatification, it was found intact. Later, his heart—also incorrupt—was removed. The body and heart are encased in separate glass reliquaries at the church in Ars.

Saint John Vianney is celebrated for giving people direction in their lives. He became widely known and thousands came to him. In one year alone, Ars was visited by 100,000 pilgrims. The little town became such a magnet that a line of train track was laid linking it to Lyon. During his last decade, he spent up to 18 hours a day in the confessional. Pope John XXIII proclaimed him to be a role model for all priests to emulate.

"I know that many Americans don't understand the veneration of relics," Father Mangano said. "This is a practice that is common in Europe, not here. I would tell those unfamiliar with this practice to look beyond the relic to see how Saint John Vianney used all of himself to the glory of God."

Father Mangano explained that the body parts chosen to be relics usually were related to the saint's strengths.

"In a number of his writings, Saint John Vianney described our hearts as small, because they were human and tended to be self-serving," Father Mangano explained. "He said that prayer and devoting your life to others expand the heart. His own heart was large with generosity, so that was why they removed it for special veneration."

Father Mangano asked Bishop Bagnard to bring the heart to Long Island when they were together at a weeklong priests' retreat in Ars last year.

The celebration is being supported by *The Catholic Heart*, an independent organization of concerned Roman Catholics. The mission of *The Catholic Heart* is to create a renewed spirit and respect for priests throughout the world. The organization grew from a small group of parishioners organized to plan for the arrival of the heart of Saint John Vianney.

For much more downloadable information and photos about Saint John Vianney, the celebration, incorruptibles, relics, the miracles attributed to the saint, short bios of the principals, and a schedule of events, please go to: <http://www.TheCatholicHeart.org>

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