

## TWO LORETOS AT THE UN

Among the hundreds of NGOs (Non-Government Organisations) working at the United Nations, two have a very special bond. The **Loretto Community**, founded in the USA in 1812, and the **Loreto Sisters**, founded in Europe in 1609, share very similar values and a devotion to Mary (Our Lady) of Loreto, venerated for many centuries at a popular centre of pilgrimage on the Adriatic Coast of Italy. Both participate in committees concerned with the status of women, poverty eradication, financing for development and environmental protection. Currently both NGOs have interns working in New York, and are seeking to understand more about each other's community and history.



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## The Loretto Community

The Sisters of Loreto and Co-members comprise the Loretto Community, existing to praise God and minister to people. The Loretto Community live in the desert Southwest, the hills of Kentucky, cities dotting the East and West coasts, and many places in between ... some live in Europe, Canada, South America, and Africa. The spirit and mission are grounded in the gospel.

Loretto's founders, **Mary Rhodes**, **Ann Havern** and **Christina Stuart**, began by teaching the children on the Kentucky frontier. When they decided to form a religious community, they turned to Father Charles Nerinckx, the Belgian missionary priest who served the area, for his advice and help in writing their rule and receiving approval for their new community. Founded in 1812 as Friends of Mary at the Foot of the Cross, the first sisters dedicated their lives to God as religious women and educated poor children of the area. They derived strength from communal living and prayer. They later took the name Sisters of Loreto at the Foot of the Cross. Today the name Loretto Community incorporates the two types of membership in Loreto: sisters who make public profession of vows and co-members who affiliate with the spirit and mission of the community. In recent years, the community began a volunteer program for short-term service opportunities.

Through the teachings and insights of Vatican II, the Loretto community gained a new understanding of their vocation. Just as frontier living shaped the lives of the early sisters, so a global society shapes the

work of today. Like the early sisters who called themselves Friends of Mary, the Loretto community stands below the cross and strives to bring the healing spirit of God into our world and improve the conditions of those who suffer from injustice, oppression, and deprivation of dignity.

Website: [www.lorettoattheun.org/](http://www.lorettoattheun.org/)

See website for details of newsletter *Loretto at the UN*

Facebook: Loretto at the UN

## **Loretto Sisters/Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary**

The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, often referred to as the “Loretto Sisters,” was founded by an Englishwoman, **Mary Ward**, in 1609. Her dream was to begin a new kind of community of women religious - independent, self-governing, free of the confines of the cloisters and responsive to the urgent needs of her time. She believed that women were equal to men in intellect and should be educated accordingly.

*Mary Ward and her Companions*

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She chose the Constitutions of St Ignatius, founder of the Jesuits, as the way of life which she and her sisters would follow. Their aim would be to give glory to God by their work of service in the church through education and other ministries. Mary Ward was quickly joined by many companions, as she opened schools for girls across Europe. Her particular devotion to the Marian shrine of Loreto in Italy explains why many of the schools and other ministries undertaken by her followers bear the name *Loreto*.



Her work flourished, however her prophetic vision proved to be too radical for the church authorities. The congregation was suppressed in 1631 and Mary was imprisoned by the church as a heretic. She was later acquitted of heresy, although official approval of her Institute was not granted until 1877. By this time her Institute had grown significantly and spread across the globe. The vision of Mary Ward and her companions, with its focus on the education of young women – in particular those living in poverty – is as relevant today as it was four centuries ago.

International website for IBVM Loreto: [www.ibvm.org](http://www.ibvm.org)

Facebook: Loreto ibvm UN

Email: [communication@loreto.org.au](mailto:communication@loreto.org.au) to receive the *Loreto Friends Networker (Australia)*

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