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Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Knock Shrine, Mayo, Quebec / Pèlerinage au sanctuaire Our Lady of Knock, à Mayo, au Québec

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Réseau canadien de préservation de la migration irlandaise

Pilgrimage to Our Lady of Knock Shrine, Mayo, Quebec

By Katherine Diamond



Front façade of St. Malachy's Church in Mayo, Québec. © CIMPN-RCPMI 2026

“Every pilgrimage begins with a journey.” These salient words opened the August 23rd, 2026, sermon in St. Malachy's Church, located alongside a picturesque country road in Mayo, Québec. However, this sermon did not take place during a typical Sunday service. Indeed, the program for the day was arranged to celebrate the annual pilgrimage to Our Lady of Knock Shrine, which parishioners from far and wide have celebrated in Mayo for sixty-nine years. Archbishop Paul-André Durocher, assisted by Father John Braganza of the parish of St. Malachy, guided the

congregation through this special anniversary event. However, despite this tradition taking place in the heart of the Outaouais, the roots of this pilgrimage stretch back one-hundred-and-forty-seven years.

The story begins in County Mayo, Ireland

On August 21st, 1879, in the small village of Knock in County Mayo, Ireland, farmers were busy in the fields managing the summer harvest. They would rapidly be called from their work by one of their fellow villagers, who urged them to come to the local church. When they arrived, they were struck by a shocking sight: an apparition of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Saint John the Evangelist. Alongside them was both a lamb and a cross, bathed in white light. According to the witnesses of this event, who were numerous, the apparition continued to present itself for two more hours, with not a drop of rain from the summer storm touching the holy figures.

The villagers of Mayo were astonished by what they had seen, and in their devotion to their Catholic faith, they would construct a shrine to the miracle in the village itself, forever cementing the story in the minds of local believers. Yet, this miracle did not remain fixed to the landscape of Ireland. As immigrants from Mayo crossed the Atlantic in search of better opportunities for themselves and their families in North America, they would find themselves in a land that appeared much familiar to them. The misty green hills of the Québec countryside reminded them distinctly of the county from which they had hailed. Therefore, they decided to honor their new home with the same name as their beloved county: Mayo.



Landscape of Mayo, Québec. © CIMPN-RCPMI 2026

The Shrine of Our Lady of Knock in Mayo, Quebec

The story of the visitation of these three holy figures in their village persisted through the generations, until it reached the ears of a local parish priest. After hearing the story of the miracle at Knock and visiting the Irish shrine himself, Father Clement Braceland endeavoured to create a shrine for his own community. With the help of local parishioners, parish resident Kevin Garvey designed and built the shrine, which would be officially revealed and blessed in 1955 by the Bishop of Ottawa. It would be named on behalf of the apparition of the Virgin Mary, who Knock locals lovingly called “Our Lady of Knock”.



Our Lady of Knock Shrine, depicting the visitation of the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and Saint John the Evangelist, located within St. Malachy's Church in Mayo, Québec. © CIMPN-RCPMI 2026

Since 1957, the parishioners of Mayo, alongside many visitors, have made an annual pilgrimage to the shrine to celebrate their Catholic faith and to honour the early community members who crossed the ocean with the story of this miracle. This year's celebration was another great success, with the pews of the nineteenth-century church being filled to bursting with families and friends. After the service, parishioners braved the stormy summer weather— not unlike the weather reported in Knock on the night of the vision— for lunch and conversation. Visitors were in high spirits in spite of the rain, chatting amongst themselves under covered tables or having informal picnics in the church itself. Committee organizers reported that they were already beginning to plan for next year's event, as it would be the seventieth annual pilgrimage to Our Lady of Knock Shrine.

Despite the municipality's small population, Mayo, Québec brims with life and is teeming with history. Whether through a visit to St. Malachy's and their shrine, or a trip just down Route 315 to one of the community's historic cemeteries, visitors can easily recognize that Mayo's residents continue to deeply value the area's rich past. Indeed, all pilgrimages start with a journey, and for the residents of Mayo, it is a journey they have chosen to never forget.

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Flag of the Irish county of Mayo, hanging in a booth outside St. Malachy's Church in Mayo, Québec. © CIMPN-RCPMI 2026