



Press release:

## **25 Years of Shrines of Europe**

### **Joint ceremony in Altötting on 2nd July 2022: Mayors of all member towns announce even closer cooperation and joint cultural events**

(Altötting/Vienna, 4th July 2022) A ceremony was held in Altötting on 2nd July in the presence of all the mayors of the seven member towns to mark the 25th anniversary of the Shrines of Europe. The community of the most important European Marian shrines announced an increase in cooperation. This is to be especially visible in joint cultural activities. The photo exhibition "Shrines of Europe – A Path of Culture and Spirituality" was launched in the Altötting City Gallery. It will be shown as a travelling exhibition in all member towns in 2022 and 2023. In the long-term, the Shrines of Europe are also pursuing an application to become a cultural route of the Council of Europe.

The Shrines of Europe are a municipal union of the European pilgrimage cities of Altötting (Germany), Częstochowa (Poland), Einsiedeln (Switzerland), Lourdes (France), Loreto (Italy), Fátima/Ourém (Portugal) and Mariazell (Austria).

#### **Increased joint cultural marketing**

Luís Miguel Albuquerque, President of the Shrines of Europe and Mayor of Fátima, gave an outlook on the future of the Shrines: "We are united by our strong tradition as Marian pilgrimage towns. In addition, all Shrines cities offer a rich European history and culture, which is something we want to make our guests and pilgrims even more aware of in the future. In line with this, we will be focusing our joint marketing more on joint cultural activities."

Shrines Vice-President and Mayor of Częstochowa, Krzysztof Matyjaszczyk, stressed the importance of European and international cooperation for international understanding and peace. The Vice-President emphasised that the community was "actively committed to solidarity, democracy, peace, freedom and justice".

The festivities were brought to a dignified conclusion at the invitation of the Mayor of Altötting and Vice-President of the Shrines of Europe, Stephan Antwerpen, when all the mayors present signed the "Golden Book of the City of Altötting".

#### **Travelling Photo Exhibition and European Days of Music**

Coinciding with the ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the Shrines of Europe, the European Days of Music took place in Altötting until 3rd July. Music groups travelled from the Marian shrines: Makabunda from Częstochowa, Delfina Henriques from Fátima – who brought Portuguese Fado to Altötting – Alessandro Menghi & Toni Felicioli from Loreto, Les Chanteurs Montagnards de Lourdes with typical Pyrenean sounds and the Ensemble Zwoa zu Drei Blos from Mariazell.



The photo exhibition "Shrines of Europe – A Path of Culture and Spirituality" can still be seen in the Stadtgalerie Altötting until 24th July. The exhibition displays 100 typical motifs from the cities of the Shrines of Europe: from Marian shrines to devotional objects and architecture. Glimpses of local gastronomy and plates whet your appetite for discovery. The exhibition was designed and arranged by young photographers who travelled to the seven Shrines of Europe for the exhibition.

For more information on the exhibition, please visit: [www.altoetting.de/stadtgalerie](http://www.altoetting.de/stadtgalerie).

## **25 years of Shrines of Europe**

The Shrines of Europe were founded in 1996, one year after the first international congress of European Marian shrines in Loreto in 1995. Its founding members were Altötting, Częstochowa, Fátima, Loreto and Lourdes. The first website and a first joint brochure were introduced in 1998. Mariazell has been a member since 2004, and Einsiedeln since 2017. In addition to a constant exchange on a cultural, sporting and tourist level, highlights in the 25-year history of the Shrines of Europe included the publication of an illustrated book and a special stamp to mark the 20th anniversary of the Shrines of Europe. In 2020, the community restructured itself to professionalise future joint cooperation. This was followed by a relaunch of the website, an increase in social media activities, the publication of brochures and a joint appearance at tourism workshops.

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**Shrines of Europe** is a association formed in 1996 at the local level in which Europe's most important Marian pilgrimage cities are represented: Altötting (Germany), Częstochowa (Poland), Einsiedeln (Switzerland), Lourdes (France), Loreto (Italy), Fátima/Ourém (Portugal) and Mariazell (Austria). The mission of the association is to bring the most important Marian shrines in Europe closer to pilgrims from all over the world under the common umbrella of "Shrines of Europe" and to tackle the challenges and demands of modern pilgrimage sites in the 21st century together. As great devotees of Mary, the last two European popes, John Paul II and Benedict XVI, visited all the Shrines of Europe, underlining the great importance of these places of pilgrimage for Europe. More Information: <http://www.shrines-of-europe.com>

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