

Society

A community making a difference in the lives of others

Nuns find riches in poverty, joy in caring for elderly



Photo courtesy of Robert Lease

Il Papa Pope Benedict XVI is seen arriving in Vatican Square on Oct. 11 for the canonization ceremonies that designated Jeanne Jugan, a French woman and founder of the Little Sisters of the Poor, as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church.



Photo courtesy of Mary Florian

Up Close At the entrance procession for the canonization Mass, a novice (white veil) and Little Sister (gray veil), Sr. Jeanne Emmanuël, had a direct view of the Pope.



Photo courtesy of John Feenari

Pope Benedict XVI, left, is dwarfed by a painted reproduction of Jeanne Jugan, who was canonized as a saint on Oct. 11. Jugan, a French woman, who founded what would become the Little Sisters of the Poor in the early 1800s.



Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Budgeteer Another Peninsulan, businessman Lawrence McNeill, is on the Sisters' advisory board and taught them the skills of managing a major budget.



Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Volunteers Mary Winzen, left, and Dr. Noreen McGuinness are both from the Hill. Winzen coordinates the volunteers. In the past, McGuinness spent many years working in the volunteer office. Each is a Daughter of Malta, a group committed to helping the Little Sisters.



Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Most Rev. Joseph Sartoris was one of four visiting bishops who celebrated Mass of thanksgiving and canonization of St. Jeanne Jugan.



Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Monsignor David A. Sork, pastor of St. John Fisher Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, con-celebrated the mass held on Nov. 21, in San Pedro with Cardinal Roger Mahony.

Little Sisters of Poor find joy seeing their founder canonized, but now need a donation or two.

By Frank Brown
Peninsula News

Christmas came early this year for a small group of women known as Little Sisters of the Poor, when their founder, Jeanne Jugan, was canonized as a saint of the Roman Catholic church.

That event took place in Rome on Oct. 11, when Pope Benedict XVI welcomed a peasant French woman, born in 1792, into sainthood.

While thousands attended the canonization in Rome, more than 1,100 people crowded into Mary Star of the Sea Church in San Pedro for a Mass held on Nov. 21 by Cardinal Roger Mahony. He concelebrated the Mass with four bishops and 16 priests.

But it is the people in local communities who directly support the Sisters in their mission.

Local support

There are more than 200 women from the Peninsula, San Pedro and South Bay who are members of the Auxiliary of the Little Sisters of the Poor.

One of the people they reached out to for help is Peninsula businessman Lawrence (Larry) McNeil.

"I was asked to join the advisory board 10 years ago," he said. "We taught them how to budget. They're a group of great women, wonderful and so giving. But they had a big nut to crack: converting a former high school into a hospital."

McNeil added that "the Sisters have some interesting sidelights built into their system. First of all, their charter is very strict. They must take a vow of humility and they must go out and beg."

"I've heard stories," he said, "about two of the little nuns intimidating the CEO of a major bank into making a contribution."

McNeill said that the Jeanne Jugan Residence on

Western Avenue in San Pedro is "unbelievably warm and loving."

McNeil also called the nuns "playful." He had taken his three granddaughters to visit the residence and they were quite impressed when one of the sisters suddenly appeared sporting a huge red nose and singing "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer."

Another view

Des Armstrong and his wife, Ann, of Rancho Palos Verdes, also have high praise for the Little Sisters.

"I've had a lot of contact with them," Ann said, "because my mother was in the home before she died. In today's world to do the kind of work they do, with so much loving care, is beyond self-sacrifice. Their chapel exudes such peace and serenity."

"When [the Sisters have] a loved one in their residence, they have such a sense of happiness about every day," she added. "I was there with my sisters and grieving and they came in and sang 'Salve Regina.' What a way to go; my mother couldn't have written it better. She couldn't have been in a better place."

How to help the helpers

Like everyone else these days, the Little Sisters can't ignore their own budget realities. The nuns receive 40 percent of their operating costs from various government agencies. They rely heavily on legacies and gifts for the remaining 60 percent of their operating costs.

Outright gifts and support for their fundraising events make up 35 percent of the shortfall. Foundations help with another 10 percent and individual donations bring in an additional 20 percent. Donated goods make up the final 5 percent of the needed amount. To send a donation to the Sisters, call

For those whose own purse strings are tied, the Sisters need volunteers. To become a volunteer and work with the Little Sisters, call (310) 625-7701.

— Pat Brown
contributed to this article.



Photo by Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Trio Sister Michael, Sister Clotilde and Mother Marguerite, pictured above, are shown at the celebratory Mass in San Pedro. Mother Marguerite has been transferred to Palatine, Ill., as superior of other Sisters working there.



Frank Brown, Peninsula News

Early Christmas Gift Twelve Sisters of the Poor took time away from caring for elderly to pose for this picture. Arrayed behind them is Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony, center, flanked by four bishops: Most Rev. Oscar A. Solis, Most Rev. Edward Wm. Clark, Most Rev. Joseph Sartoris and Most Rev. Alexander Salazar.