

BELIEFS

San Pedro nuns celebrate a saint

Their order's founder will be canonized next week. Thanks to their fundraising, a local contingent will go.

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Organizing a country-western hoedown was a first for the nuns. So were the *carne asada* sale and the trips to the casino.

But then again it isn't everyday that the founder of your religious order will be canonized by the Pope.

For 30 years, members of the Little Sisters of the Poor, a worldwide Roman Catholic order, have operated a home for the elderly in San Pedro, a facility devoted to the care of about 100 impoverished elderly residents.

They call themselves "the begging order" and rely on God's providence to provide the financial means to meet the needs of some 202 homes they run in 32 countries.

The sisters in San Pedro felt that Sunday's upcoming canonization of founder Jeanne Jugan is too momentous an event to miss. They'll be sending one nun and two residents to join 4,000 other sisters, residents and supporters at the Vatican.

But raising money for this journey — as well as hosting a local celebration at the San Pedro home — required a bit more creative fundraising than begging for bread at the local supermarket.

'A special patron'

"This is an event in history that won't be repeated for us," said Mother Superior Marguerite McCarthy of the San Pedro home, one of 30 in the United States. "It's very significant. . . . We hope it gives the elderly, that it gives all of us, a special patron, but especially the elderly who we know she understands the most."

The canonization by Pope Benedict XV will take place in an elaborate ceremony in St. Peter's Square.



THE FOUNDER: Reflected in a portrait of Jeanne Jugan, one of the Little Sisters of the Poor works in the San Pedro order's dining room.

It follows a rigorous church investigation of Jugan's life and an acknowledgment by the church that a miracle — the healing of a man with cancer — was attributed to her intercession.

To pay tribute and educate everyone at the senior center they operate on South Western Avenue, the sisters decorated hallways with tableaux bearing Jugan's cloaked image.

Workers and residents launched a play about her life

of servitude and wrote a mini biography.

Their hope is that Jugan's sainthood will highlight their mission to value the wisdom and experience of the elderly.

At their homes, the Little Sisters make sure that elderly people don't die alone but are surrounded in their last moments with singing and prayers.

To raise the nearly \$10,000 they needed for the trip, the sisters held more than 20 fund-

raisers in three months.

They sold hamburgers, nachos, hot dogs, Italian sausages, omelets, waffles and baked potatoes.

They held bake sales, ice cream socials and a rummage sale.

Twice they raised money by taking residents to a casino, and last week, in one of their final events, they hosted a country-western hoedown in their auditorium, complete with hay stacks and line dancing.

Pitching in

Residents and their relatives, along with gardeners, nurses and anyone else working at the center, showed up to events and pitched in with \$3.50, \$2.50 or even 50 cents each time.

Anne J. Coyne, a longtime San Pedro home resident, began to read more about the soon-to-be saint when she learned about the canonization.

Although she will not travel to Rome, she pitched in to help with many events and walked around the home sharing stories about Jugan.

On the day of the ceremony, she will join others in the auditorium to watch the event on a big-screen television.

"She gave up her life, she gave up her bed, she carried people on her back from the gutters," she said. "I wish I could do the same thing and I admire her for it."



FUNDRAISING: Nuns prepare for a dinner last month in San Pedro to raise money to send a group to Jugan's canonization by Pope Benedict XV at the Vatican.

And true to their beliefs, the sisters raised enough money to pay for their trip.

Outsiders are typically astonished at how the nuns cover the expenses of a center with about 100 employees and 100 patients.

The annual budget exceeds \$4 million, and some months they find themselves short until the last minute, when donors' checks arrive in the mail or they have to borrow money.

"It's a real knot-in-the-stomach kind of time," said the center's development director

Rita Swartz. "But in the end, God supports their work through the goodness of others."

Most of what is needed in the home is donated, be it dinner rolls or envelopes.

Sister Michael Mugan visits supermarkets, restaurants and produce wholesalers daily to ask for food and other products.

"They see me coming and say, 'What do you need today sister?'" said Mugan, who hopes Jugan's new sainthood status will give the order more credibility and bring in more donations.

2,700 members

Each day, sisters said, they try to live their lives as Jugan did. She began her ministry on the streets of her native France in the early 1800s. Since then, the Little Sisters of the Poor have spread across the globe, as far as Africa and the Philippines.

The order has about 2,700 members who look after approximately 13,000 elderly people.

Pope John Paul II beatified Jugan in 1982, and Pope Benedict XVI noted she was on the path to sainthood earlier this year after a church investigation showed that she had posthumously interceded with a miracle on behalf of an Omaha man who was cured of what had been diagnosed as terminal cancer.

The significance of the canonization was not lost on Inez David, one of two senior center residents flying to Rome for the canonization.

Since June, the 82-year-old has worked hard to help the sisters raise money.

On a recent Thursday, she eagerly moved about the auditorium, decorating for the hoedown.

The next night she planned to arrive with a pistol and a cowboy hat to promote the cause.

"It's a great blessing to be a part of this honor," she said. "It's something I will never forget."