

She's Dedicated to Little Sisters of the Poor

Marie Treacy Leads Auxiliary Planning Annual Celebration | by BETTY LUKAS

MARIE TREACY LEARNED TO LOVE NUNS

and the work they do when she attended parochial schools in the Bay Area, where she was born. "I cherish the [12] years I spent with them," she said during a recent interview.

And, as the niece of a Monsignor who conducted Mass for the deaf at his church in San Francisco, she learned to admire his work when she attended services there with her family. "His ministry to the deaf was even remarkable from a child's perspective," she explained, still impressed at the thought.

So sets the stage for her commitments during the past several years of her life.

Marie now finds herself working closely with the Little Sisters of the Poor order of Catholic nuns in San Pedro, and interpreting at Mass each Sunday at Holy Angels Catholic Church of the Deaf in Vernon, the only such church in Los Angeles.

As president of the Little Sisters of the Poor Auxiliary, Marie and her 17-member board are busily preparing for the group's 12th Annual Celebration scheduled to begin at 6 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 19, at Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes.

Last year's event raised \$250,000 at the home, she said. "We hope to exceed that figure this year. All proceeds go directly to the Sisters for maintenance of the home and caring for the residents," she added.

The home is located at 2100 South Western Ave. in San Pedro. Its formal name is the Jeanne Jugan Residence in honor of the French nun, who founded the order in 1839 "when she opened her home to Jesus Christ in the person of an elderly, poor, blind woman," according to a publication celebrating its 100th year in the Los Angeles area, which occurred in 2005. Jeanne Jugan will be canonized as a saint by Pope Benedict XVI on Oct. 11, Marie noted. Although Marie won't be attending the ceremony in Rome, she beams, "It's so exciting."

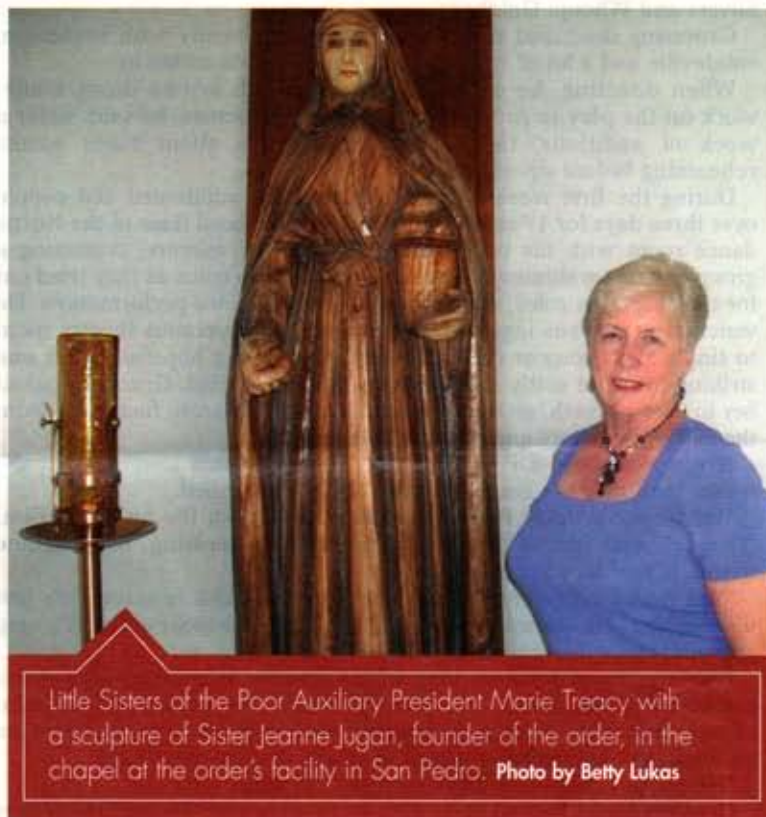
About 100 elderly and low income residents — not all of them Catholic — live at the home at present, "We do not discriminate," said Mother Marguerite, administrator at the facility, as she greeted a visitor, adding that the structure served as a boys' high school more than 30 years ago. The former school library on the second floor is now a chapel, for example pointed out another nun, Sister Genevieve, as she opened the door to a large, airy room with pews, an altar and a statue of the order's soon-to-be patron saint Jeanne Jugan.

Several wings of the expansive, multi-floor structure contain an assortment of accommodations, depending on whether the resident's need is for independent living or nursing care, she explained. A \$5 million remodeling project prepared the facility for its new life after the original home in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles was declared a fire hazard.

At present, nine sisters plus a support staff of 95 provide service to their residents 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Mother Marguerite pointed out.

Marie Treacy has been part of the order's auxiliary for the past seven years.

"It is an honor and a privilege to support the Little Sisters in their work and to be involved in the legacy of Jeanne Jugan," Marie said with obvious satisfaction.



Little Sisters of the Poor Auxiliary President Marie Treacy with a sculpture of Sister Jeanne Jugan, founder of the order, in the chapel at the order's facility in San Pedro. Photo by Betty Lukas

But long before her current life of service to the Little Sisters and to the deaf, Marie Treacy, now 68 and a widow, grew up with her sister in a "family of faith, responsibility and service to others," she explained.

An eager learner whose father was a high school teacher and part-time administrator, Marie said, "I loved to play school with sister, Jeanne, during summer months, and I spent many hours with my father as he prepared weekly for his high school class. The fact that I became a teacher is due in no small part to the many hours of quality time I spent with him as he prepped for his students," she reflected as she recalled her "happy and secure childhood."

Her mother worked at a doctor's office, "two blocks from home, but it was very unusual in those days for women to work outside the home," she noted. "I never knew why she worked, because my parents never talked about finances, but perhaps that had something to do with it.

"What I did know is that I wanted to be a stay-at-home mother after I got married. Maybe it's because all of the other children had stay-at-home mothers," she speculated.

And that's what she did a few years after graduating from Mt. St. Mary's College in Los Angeles, which she attended after winning a California State Merit Scholarship.

She majored in education, earned a teaching credential in 1962 and taught in the Valley until she met and married her husband in 1964. "We met at a Catholic alumni club for singles," she explained.

She became a stay-at-home mom after their first child, a daughter, was born in 1965. Arriving later were two more daughters and a son. The family move to Rancho Palos Verdes from Santa Monica in 1974, she explained, was necessitated because her husband, an engineer who had worked for McDonnell-Douglas in El Segundo, began working for a firm in Orange County.

By 1975 her husband became ill, and "suddenly I was thrown back into the working world [of teaching]. I'd always loved teaching," she said. In 1985, she received her Master's Degree in Special Education from California State University Dominguez Hills. "Uncle Michael [the monsignor] had always stayed interested in my life, and when he'd come to visit, he'd urge me to teach the deaf. I really didn't listen to him until he died, but then I kept getting this feeling, so I decided I'd do it," she noted. Soon after earning her master's, she enrolled in El Camino College's sign language classes to further hone her already special skills.

Those combined skills bring her to the Vernon church every Sunday where she interprets as the priest signs for his deaf parishioners. "Few people know that 90 percent of the deaf are born to hearing parents," she explained, "which is why I am there to interpret the Mass."

Prior to her weekly presence at Holy Angels, she said she taught deaf children at President Elementary School in San Pedro from which she retired in 2004, and now works professionally as an interpreter whenever her services are required.

"I'm happy with my life now," she said. "I'm content. What's important to me is, first, my faith, then my family and then my friends."

It's very apparent that she has them all.

The 12th Annual Celebration of Little Sisters of the Poor, hosted by the Little Sisters of the Poor Auxiliary, will begin at 6 p.m., Saturday, Sept. 19, with a cocktail reception and silent auction at Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes. A tribute to Jeanne Jugan, dinner and a live auction will follow. Tickets are \$175 each, and may be obtained by calling 310-548-9625 or going to www.lspsoal.org. PEN