

Little Sisters: A century serving elderly poor in L.A.

Story and photos by R. W. Dellinger
SPECIAL TO THE TIDINGS

At an outdoor, afternoon liturgy June 25 in San Pedro, some 500 residents, family members and friends gave public thanks for the Little Sisters of the Poor — and their century of caring for the elderly poor here in Los Angeles Archdiocese.

“It would be almost impossible to add up and calculate all the good that they have done over 100 years, the many lives that they have touched directly at St. Ann’s Home in Boyle Heights and here,” declared Cardinal Roger Mahony, who celebrated the Mass in the chapel garden along with Auxiliary Bishops Joseph Sartoris and Alexander Salazar.

Later in his homily, the cardinal praised the Little Sisters’ “extraordinary generosity” year after year, century after century.

“All who have come to the sisters have been deeply touched by the warmth and the example — the real living love and charity — that they show constantly to all of the elderly,” he said. “There’s a sense of respect for the person, a level of care, that you do not often find in many residential care centers that we priests often visit.

“So we’re very, very grateful to the sisters for keeping alive the charism of your foundress and your presence here in this archdiocese as well as in all continents of the world. We are indeed grateful to you, and we salute all of you today. We also have a new moment to recommit ourselves to the same charism of love, one to another.

“Let our ears and eyes be opened — like the sisters — to the poor,” he added, “whom God has sent to us in the name of Jesus as a very special gift.”

Mother Provincial Gertrude Mary, superior provincial of the Little Sisters’ Chicago Province, which includes Southern California, said the community’s history was full of stories — and even miracles — of divine providence. She described Blessed Jeanne Jugan, who was beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1982, as a woman of praise and gratitude who relied totally on God.

“It was in this spirit that the daughters



SAN PEDRO HOME — The Jeanne Jugan Residence, which houses 90 older adults, sits on a bluff near Western Avenue.



GATHERING — Residents and relatives assemble for June 25 liturgy marking Little Sisters of the Poor centennial in Los Angeles.

of Jeanne Jugan ventured here a hundred years ago, arriving with nothing but their undaunted courage and trust in God,” she remarked after the liturgy. “The sisters were faced sometimes with what seemed like insurmountable obstacles. But thanks to their faith and unbounding trust, we are here today.”

From Boyle Heights to San Pedro

On a winter day in 1839, Jeanne Jugan carried Anne Chauvin, an elderly poor, blind woman, to her home in St. Servan, France — and the Little Sisters of the Poor were born.

Today, the 3,300 women religious, whose members take a special fourth vow of hospitality, have 220 homes in 31 countries, including 32 in North America.

The first missionary group of Little Sisters to the United States arrived in New York

on Sept. 14, 1868, establishing a home in Brooklyn. A year after the turn of the century, they made their way to San Francisco. And on Jan. 18, 1905, Mother Provincial Mélanie and three Little Sisters from Chicago came to Los Angeles at the invitation of Bishop Thomas Conaty.

After leasing two connected homes at 28th and Main for three years, a San Francisco businessman benefactor bought the Little Sisters seven acres of land in Boyle Heights. An impressive brick structure with two wings for elderly men and women indigents was

dedicated and christened “St. Ann’s Home” in early 1908. For seven decades, St. Ann’s was one of the major old-age homes in Los Angeles, until the 1933 Long Beach and 1971 Sylmar earthquakes cracked its walls and foundation.



FOUNDRESS — In 1839, Blessed Jeanne Jugan founded the Little Sisters of the Poor in St. Servan, France.

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles gave the Little Sisters Fermin Lasuén High School in San Pedro, which had closed the same year as the Sylmar quake. And after a \$5 million campaign to renovate the school and construct another building on campus, 120 residents moved to their new home — the Jeanne Jugan Residence — on August 7, 1979.

Today, the sprawling complex, on a bluff off Western Avenue, houses some 90 elderly men and women. The facility has independent living apartments, residential and assisted living, and skilled nursing care in a home-like setting. There’s a beauty parlor, gift shop, library, chapel and park-like grounds.

By offering this continuum of care, the Little Sisters in San Pedro have continued their foundress’s mission to the elderly and dying poor, offering a prophetic pro-life witness for 100 years in Southern California.

‘A special grace’

Sister Paul, who ran the sound system at the century celebration, entered the Little Sisters after high school. She lived a block away from their home in Detroit, where her grandmother was a resident. She saw their hands-on care and liked how approachable the sisters were. She would even skip school to help them out as a volunteer sometimes.

The Midwesterner became a nurse and was first assigned to the Jeanne Jugan Residence in 1979 when it opened, where she met Sister Antoinette of the Epiphany, one of the early “collection” sisters at St. Ann’s. For 49 years, Sister Antoinette begged house to house, business to business for food and support for residents — first on foot, later in a buggy pulled by a horse named “Babe” and finally in a van.

The main joys of being a Little Sister of the Poor, according to Sister Paul, are living in a close-knit community and being able to accompany the elderly on their last journey.

“The rewards are thinking that we’re sending someone to heaven at the end of their life,” she told *The Tidings*. “To be so close to them at that moment, it’s just very thrilling. It’s a special grace.” ❖



CENTENNIAL — Little Sisters of the Poor leave chapel garden after June 25 Mass of Thanksgiving.



TWO TOURS — Sister Paul, who entered the Little Sisters of the Poor after high school, served at the San Pedro home from 1979 to 1983, and again from 1997 to the present.