

# Serenity

no. 161 Little Sisters of the Poor January 2014



**SOLIDARITY BETWEEN  
the YOUNG and the ELDERLY**  
leads to the understanding that the Church  
is effectively the family of all generations,  
in which everyone must feel at home.

— Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski



## Our Mission

Continuing the work of Saint Jeanne Jugan, our MISSION is to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself.

Cover photo: Mother General Celine greets a Resident during her visit to Dublin (see story on page 23).

# Serenity

JANUARY 2014, No. 161

Published quarterly by the  
Little Sisters of the Poor  
with ecclesiastical approval  
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Annual donation: \$5.00  
Standard Postage paid at  
Baltimore, MD



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# The Church as the family of all generations

HUMAN SOLIDARITY was one of the central ideals championed by Blessed, soon-to-be Saint, John Paul II. In fact, it has always been a central value in the Church's social teaching. From this optic, our Church's pastors have been speaking more and more often about the unity necessary between generations. Last October, Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, president of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, published a message entitled *The Value of the Life of the Elderly*, in which he spoke of this virtue:

“Solidarity between the young and the elderly leads to the understanding that the Church is effectively the family of all generations, in which everyone must feel at home, which must not be guided by the logic of profit and of ‘having’, but rather by that of gratuitousness and love. When, during old age life becomes fragile, it never loses its value nor its dignity; everyone is wanted and loved by God, everyone is important and necessary.... In this way there enters the value of a specific pastoral care, which includes first and foremost the fundamental element of communion between generations. ... It regards the promotion of a culture of unity: unity between generations, which must not regard each other as detached or indeed opposed; a vision of life that allows new generations to grow, immersed daily in this culture of unity, to which each person brings an indispensable contribution.”

Similarly, in November Pope Francis spoke to a gathering sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, emphasizing the essential place of the elderly in the Church: “Today I would like to repeat that the elderly have always been and still are protagonists in



the Church. Today more than ever the Church must set an example for the whole of society that, despite their inevitable and sometimes grave ‘ailments,’ the elderly are always important; indeed, they are indispensable. They carry the memory and wisdom of life to hand down to others, and they participate fully in the Church’s mission. Let us remember that in God’s eyes, human life always retains its value far beyond any discriminating vision.”

We Little Sisters are so grateful for the Church’s affirmation of the important place of the elderly in the Church and in society! In preparation for this issue of *Serenity*, we invited our Residents to share with us the wisdom, values and legacy of faith they wish to pass on to the younger generations. We also asked younger people what they have learned from the elderly. The following pages present the fruits of these reflections.

As we look forward to the feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple in February, these words of Pope Francis are particularly relevant and encouraging: “Dear [elderly] friends, you are not only recipients of the good news of the Gospel message; in virtue of your Baptism you shall always be its heralds in the truest sense. Each day you can live as witnesses of the Lord, in your families, in your parishes and in your habitual meeting places, by making Christ and his Gospel known, especially to the younger generations. Remember that it was two elderly people who recognized Jesus in the Temple and proclaimed him with joy, with hope!” ~

## Faith shared, lessons learned

*Pope Francis has spoken on numerous occasions about the bond between the young and the old. He encourages seniors to make their voices heard in society. “I ask the elderly, from my heart,” he said recently; “do not cease to be the cultural storehouse of our people, a storehouse that hands on justice, hands on history, hands on values, hands on the memory of the people. Reflecting on these words as the Year of Faith concluded, we asked the Residents of our homes to comment on the values and faith legacy they wish to leave to future generations. At the same time, we invited younger people to reflect on what they have learned from the elderly. Some of these reflections follow.*

### Let them go, they'll come back

HERE AT LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR, Auckland, we gathered together as a group one afternoon to reflect on the question, What faith legacy, values or life lessons would you like to pass on to younger generations? Here are some of the insights that were shared by our Residents...

Valerie would love for young people to know the virtue of trust, to have confidence in God, and to know he will never let them down. Valerie came to know this herself at a time when circumstances left her without a home. Homeless, feeling hopeless and without anyone to ask for support, Valerie found solace in the prayers of the Carmelite Sisters, and subsequently, she also found a home.

Moira volunteered at Little Sisters of the Poor when she was younger. For seven years, every week, she helped the older ladies to bathe. Moira says that this experience molded her life in many ways,



**Moira with a group of young students at our home in Auckland, NZ.**

most especially developing her compassion and sympathy for people who are elderly/unwell. Now a Resident herself, Moira continues to carry this learning with her today, as she visits fellow Residents throughout our home offering companionship and good humour.

Charles, now 100 years of age, reminded us of the importance of love, and treasuring those special relationships we have. He shared with us his memories of a dog with whom he created a special bond. Charles' relationship with all visiting animals is a joy to witness!

Some years ago, Sr. Loreto heard something that touched her deeply and remained with her to this day in regard to young people. "Let them go. They'll come back... when you are ready to receive them ... as they are ... not as you think they should be."

Monsignor Lyons shared his experience with guiding young people in the church. It's not so important to preach about the big issues — as to simply meet people where they are at, with the needs they have in their lives right now.

Monsignor Lyons remembers visiting our home regularly when he was a boy, as part of a charity mission organized through his school. He reminded us of the value in fostering relationships between the elderly people in our homes and the young people in our local schools and communities.

Jane, who regularly shares of herself, her life experiences, and her faith with women in a local prison, described how anxious these young women are to find spiritual support. Jane offers hope and faith to the prisoners in the form of rosary beads, teaching the young women to use them as “prayer beads.” She also helps them to rediscover love for themselves and others, through reminding them that the kingdom of God is within each of them, as well as within each person they meet. “The message that I give to the young women in the prison where I am part of the chaplain’s team is that the Kingdom of God is within each one of us,” says Jane. “We should all remember that the Holy Spirit of Christ is always there to guide us. Help is always at hand.”

## The gift of smiles and stories

THE ELDERLY ALWAYS REMIND ME TO ENJOY LIFE. I think their smiles and stories of their lives give me, as a young person, hope and wonder and awe in what God can do. It’s wonderful to see the elderly light up as they share stories of the loved ones close to their heart.

However, I also remember speaking with one elderly lady, at a time when I was struggling with matters of the heart, and she shared her story along with her fears. It was so humbling that God allowed me to have an encounter and through her, He reminded me that He Alone is our First Love. It was also wonderful though, to hear practical advice from a wise woman on “how to cope” while smiling through pain.

– *Annabelle de Leon,  
volunteer, Sydney, Australia*

## The more you pray, the greater your faith

FAITH IS BELIEVING IN GOD first of all and putting your trust in God, which helped me out in my life after my husband died and left me with five children. Faith and prayer — prayer has power and it did for me all this time.

Faith is my whole life. I couldn't live without faith. I pray morning, noon and night and during the day, for myself, for my children, for my family and my friends.

Especially when my husband died at a young age and I had five children and the youngest was just sixteen months. So, I don't think I would be able to get along if I did not have the faith in God and pray to God to help me at this particular time. My husband was forty three when he died. I've been a widow for fifty years. And faith has been my strength.

The more you pray, the more faith you have, the stronger it is. I pray for my children, so that they get along with their spouses and bring their children up right.

— *Helen Magas,  
Resident, Scranton, Pennsylvania*

## What you do, do well

AS THE YEAR OF FAITH DRAWS TO AN END I become more insistent in praying for my grandchildren and great grandchildren, they need our prayers. I pray daily that God will fortify their courage and overcome their fear when faced with problems in today's world.

I would say to our young people "What you do, do well" and if you can help someone along the way, your loving will not be in vain."

— *Kathleen Varney,  
Resident, Sydney, Australia*



Irene O'Connor with Resident Frank Gilmore, Philadelphia.

## The elderly serve me

UNTIL I WENT TO COLLEGE, I was very fortunate to have all of my grandparents. They were an integral and treasured part of the life of our family. Today, our society places its values elsewhere. We fight off aging. We are too busy striving for whatever we think might bring us happiness. We no longer make the elderly a priority, especially if they have cognitive difficulties, and we forget that they are still here, especially if they no longer resemble our Mom or Dad. Our focus needs to become clearer again so that we do not marginalize our elderly and the Spirit of God that dwells in them, leaving them feeling unloved and unvalued after spending their lives sharing their gifts and making sacrifices for us.

The elderly have spent their lives walking with God, so they can see more clearly how God works in them as well as how much they need to depend on Him. They teach me to depend more on God than on myself. They have lived through times of hardship in their lives and have not given up. They teach me to persevere and to pray when I try to handle everything myself or I want to give up. They

know how quickly life passes, and they teach me to love now and to express gratitude for the love others provide me.

Each day the elderly serve me. They call me to look into my heart and examine what I treasure. They teach me to be present to what I value so that I don't miss the joy of valuing them. Their life lessons, values, and faith shine through them no matter what circumstance of health and fragility beset them. I encourage all of us to take care of the two ends of life as Pope Francis encourages us to and not to overlook the ways we can serve the elderly and let them know how much we love them.

— Irene O'Connor, Activities Director  
and AJJ member, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

## Experiences of a missionary Little Sister

ALTHOUGH I COULD WRITE THIS from the point of view of the “older generation,” I prefer to join that of the “younger generation” and share a few of the many insights and inspirations I have received over the years from our elderly Residents as a Little Sister of the Poor in Asia.

The first I recall is that of an elderly lady in our former home in Singapore. She was a convert from Buddhism and very zealous in spreading the faith. On one occasion while praying with the Sisters and a small group of Residents at the bedside of an almost unconscious dying non-Christian lady who shared her room, finding the waiting rather long, she suddenly said to her in a loud tone of voice, “Well, hurry up and make up your mind. Do you want to go to heaven or do you want to go to hell?” There was no response from her roommate, but the question itself seemed to me to come from a basic wisdom about the most important choice we must all make.

In Taiwan I also encountered many inspiring examples of faith, serenity and wisdom. In particular, one of the ladies who was afflicted with diabetes and had already lost one of her legs was always serene and joyful as she made her daily round around the infirmary on her

wheelchair, giving a word of encouragement to the other Residents. Everyone held her in great respect, even the men who were inclined to consider “women’s talk” as not worth listening to. The time came when a second operation was needed to amputate her other leg. The religious in the hospital where the surgery was done recounted afterward how she had tried to console her while transporting her on the stretcher to the operating room. She had told her not to be afraid, but just to abandon herself to God who would take care of her. The reply she received filled her with admiration – “Don’t worry, Sister, I already gave myself completely to God a long time ago.”

There was also Maria, whose husband Peter was also a Resident (and with a very difficult character). One hot summer day I encountered Maria heading for the chapel after lunch when most of the other Residents headed for their beds for a little nap. I was surprised and asked her why she wasn’t going to rest like the others. She replied, “Every day at this time I make a holy hour to pray for my husband so he will get to heaven. You know his character.” And then continuing tearfully, “If he doesn’t make it, we’ll be separated for all eternity.” I can now imagine them hand in hand with the Lord who surely heard her prayer.

In Samoa, one of the ladies who had been affected with a disease that attacked her nerves was still suffering from the after effects. Although she had been cured with the treatment, she still suffered from recurrent severe cramps in her legs which would come on suddenly. When we could hear her suddenly screaming with pain, the Sister nurse would give her the prescribed medicine, but it took some time to have effect. Once when this happened, it seemed like she was half screaming and half singing something, and as I got closer to her I could distinguish the words “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will” and the rest of the prayer of the Gloria from the Mass. Needless to say I was in admiration of this woman who could praise God in the midst of such pain.

In Hong Kong one of my fondest memories was of a little elderly lady who had lived all her life on one of the boats in the harbor and



**Yvonne Gilliver surrounded by five generations on her birthday.**

came to our home at the age of 80. She had been introduced by the Little Sisters of Jesus who, according to their charism of living with the poor and sharing their life, lived in the boat next to hers. They were very grateful to her, as she was the one who taught them how to maneuver their boat and how to survive under the harsh conditions of the boat people especially during typhoon times.

Upon entering the home she stopped in front of the main door of the chapel, removed her slippers and made a profound prostration to thank God for bringing her here. Like the other boat people, she did not have a chance to go to school, but she understood her faith. During her stay she spent much time in the chapel, in stillness and profound prayer and managed to remain peaceful and pleasant with the other Residents who at that time were very numerous and crowded in dormitories, as it was a time when many refugees were fleeing to Hong Kong. One very hot summer day when the Little Sisters of Jesus came to visit her, they found her in the chapel in prayer. All around her the other Residents present were fanning

themselves while they prayed as it was so hot, but she did not have a fan. When the Sisters suggested to her that they would get one for her she replied, “ Oh, no. How can I be thinking of fanning myself when I am with God at prayer?”

These few examples were and still are inspiring to me.

– *Sr. Imelda de l'Immaculee, l.s.p.,  
Aberdeen, Hong Kong*

## Things my mother taught me

ON OCTOBER 21<sup>ST</sup> MY MOTHER, Yvonne Gilliver, turned 90 years old. She gave birth to five children, and now has ten grandchildren, who in turn have given her twelve great-grandchildren. And she has been blessed with two great, great grandchildren with another to be delivered in January! So currently my family has five generations alive, which is a remarkable when you think about it. And from this great example I have learned the value of family-and also the joy of having a large Christmas! My mum’s ability to prepare meals from “scratch,” has influenced my own cooking. I was always very pleased when my mum’s cakes were welcomed with joy by my friends and I myself like nothing more than to cook for my friends — I cannot however make the perfect baked potato — that is mum’s secret! But she is always only a phone call away with the right advice for the right dish – like a quick recipe for white sauce for example!

My mother was born before home refrigerators, television and jet aircraft and can remember a Sydney without home telephones where horse-drawn carriages were commonplace. She has held in her arms a great-grandson who will never remember a time before mobile phones, touch screen computers or instantly downloadable movies and music.

As the youngest of five children I was entertained with stories about the great depression and World War II. They seemed to be bizarre fiction to me as a child growing up in the relatively affluent times of 1970’s Australia. In a modern, wealthy country, tales about having to milk a goat or to eat pigeon to get by made me grateful for

having something as tasty as a lamb chop and peas and potatoes on my plate. And this made me aware that there were people everywhere who were not as lucky as I. My father would do work with the St. Vincent de Paul Society and I can remember going on parish picnics with people who were refugees from Vietnam. Knowing that my own parents had known such hard times gave me a sense that a person should do what they can to help those less fortunate, who may need a hand through a tough period in their lives.

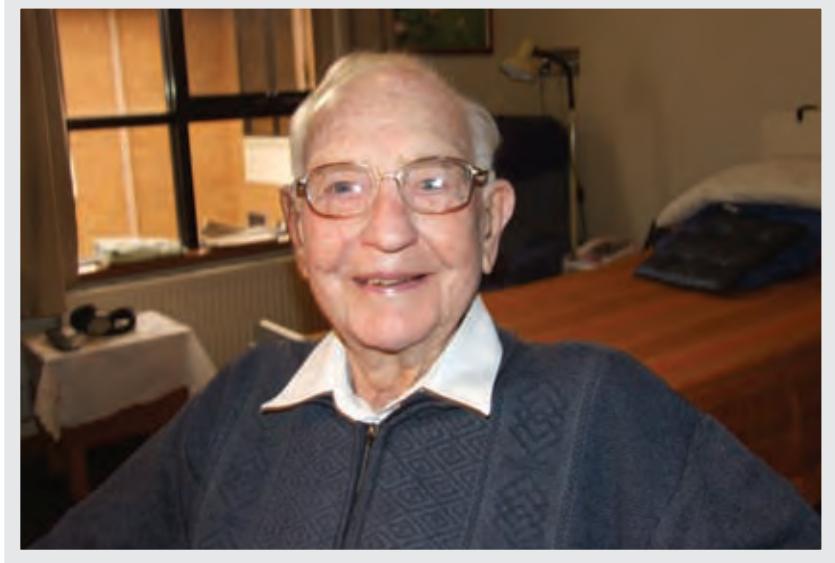
My parents sent me to the local Catholic school and this experience of course shaped my world view. My mum is very much a quiet achiever and with a large family came the lessons of playing fair, and having respect for others. And as a matter of faith she told me “never be afraid to say a prayer.”

– *Craig Gilliver, Sydney, Australia*

## Devotion to God is our legacy

MY WIFE AND I FOUND FAITH TO BE VERY IMPORTANT in how we raised our children and it was always the focus of everything we did in their upbringing. Sometimes it meant making sacrifices, but we wanted them to be raised with a strong Catholic understanding and a relationship with Jesus. My wife was/is an angel and I was/am very blessed with her as spouse and the mother of our seven children. We very much turned to God and trusted Him, always trying our best to fulfill His will. For example, the decision was made that we would move to the Twin Cities from Spokane, Washington, soon following the completion of a 54-Day Rosary Novena. We always sought God and unity with one another through daily prayer and Eucharist along with participation in the sacraments. Our devotion to God and to one another leaves a strong legacy of faith for our seven children, 19 grandchildren and 18 great grandchildren.

– *Don and Britta Showalter,  
Residents, St. Paul, Minnesota*



Brother Ken Gunn, Melbourne, Australia.

## Right is right and wrong is wrong

TO YOUNGER PEOPLE, may I make the following suggestions:

As we grow older we look back over our lives and we sometimes regret some of our actions. This will probably happen to you later in life, but, as young people, you have the opportunity to head off some of these regrets. Think now of the areas in your life that you will not be happy about in your later years. How did you treat others such as parents, teachers, the disadvantaged? Did you waste opportunities to achieve according to your ability? ...

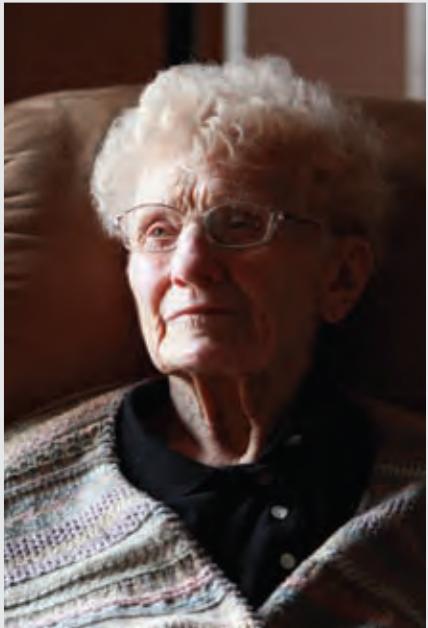
Our desire to be regarded as being familiar with the latest "fashions," as being "with it" can be a deadly trap. We must think before we act and we must remember that "right is right no matter if nobody is doing it, and "wrong is wrong even if everyone is doing it." These are some of my regrets. You can make sure now that they will not be yours.

– *Bro. Ken Gunn, Christian Brother,  
Resident, Melbourne, Australia*

## Centrality of the Mass

I BELIEVE THE LEGACY of the faith is going to Mass every Sunday, saying grace before meals and saying your bedtime prayers. If I set a good example; I hope that my children will do the same for their children!

– Margaret Smith,  
Resident, St. Paul, MN



## Believe that God will help you

DURING MY LIFE I HAD MANY ILLNESSES, including eleven surgeries and a stroke, but from early on I prayed, believed, and had faith that I would reach old age some day and be free of all that I had suffered. Here I am at age 97 and still going strong, living out my faith in this beautiful residence of the Little Sisters. Having the chapel and the sacraments is everything to me!

I thank God for my parents, who were very devout, teaching me to love God and the Church, and also for my husband who was such a faith-filled man and so devoted to me during my illnesses.

I would encourage young people to pray and to believe that God will help them. Do not forget Our Blessed Mother, who will speak to her Son for you, as she has done for me all these years.

– Emilienne (Millie) Drainville,  
Resident, Pawtucket, Rhode Island

## God is always first

DOCTORS TOLD MY PARENTS I WAS NOT GOING TO LIVE and here I am today. That is only because of Jesus. I need my faith, it is the most important thing in my life; it keeps me going. Without faith I do not know where I would be or if I would be alive. We must remember we are second and God is always first and He should be for everyone. God has given so much mercy to me and for that I am incredibly thankful, because I need his mercy.

– *Mary Lou Machart,  
Resident and AJJ member, St. Paul, Minnesota*

## The blessing of misfortune

LIKE MOST PEOPLE who have reached 91 years of age, Jack McColough has had his fair share of trials. In his youth his hearing was damaged, his marriage was one of difficulty and separation and his career path was turbulent and unpredictable. On top of all these trials, Jack is now blind. One might forgive Jack if he expressed a little bitterness about how roughly life has treated him. Yet if you asked him how he feels about all the challenges he has faced, he will simply say “When you overcome one of these bitter things, life is twice as good”

It has been Jack’s faith, as he admits, that has helped him to overcome “these bitter things.” The peace and joy that Jack has found in his life, despite the trials, has come because he has looked at all things as God’s will. Certainly this has not come easily but it has remained the driving force in his life and aided him immensely along the way. To understand his faith one can reflect on his favorite Scripture passage, which he will recite to you, “Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thess. 5).

For example as a young man, when he lost an opportunity for a job that would have meant lifelong security, he did not bemoan his

misfortune. Instead he acknowledges all of the fascinating jobs and people he has met along the way in his search for economic stability. Life may have been easier at that company, but it would not have been as interesting.

Another example of how Jack strives to find joy and thanksgiving in trial is in the loss of his vision. When asked what was his greatest loss in relation to his blindness, Jack does not mention a lack of independence or mobility as one might expect. He states that his greatest loss is that that he can no longer be a lector at Mass. “Trials are the fuel of life,” Jack will tell you, “and there is always a reason for what comes our way.”

Jack’s advice for someone seeking the joy and peace that he has experienced is very simple. “It’s all in the Our Father,” he says. “Thy will be done ... Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” These are the guiding principles that bring the peace of Christ, so lacking in many hearts. It is notable that those two phrases from the Our Father tap into the two great commandments. When we strive to love God, we will trust in His will, assured that God has our good in mind in whatever may come our way. And when we try to forgive others, we love them as we love ourselves and with these commandments engrained in our hearts, we may, like Jack, come to see the blessing of misfortune.

— *from a conversation with Jack McCollough,  
Resident, Cincinnati, Ohio*

## Closer to Heaven

A YEAR, A SHORT YEAR IN HONG KONG, was an opportunity for me to discover the Little Sisters of the Poor, whom I did not know very well before. In their witness, their generosity and their joy, I discovered the destiny of women consecrated to God in the service of the poor. Encountering them was, for me, as if I was very close to Heaven. I was welcomed very warmly and learned a lot from their example. Discussions with them were always very instructive and



spiritual. They were a light on my way of faith, a reflection of the light of God.

As a volunteer at the home for the aged, I participated in their work by taking care of elderly as far as I could. Again, I was very close to Heaven because a house that hosts the oldest people among us is the gateway of Heaven, is it not?

That is why we made an exchange: I brought them youth and they gave me an example of courage, joy and wisdom in the last stage of their lives. The family atmosphere reigning there is very impressive and touching. It is an atmosphere of love and joy. In addition, this love makes them stronger to face death in a beautiful serenity.

Finally, I have understood more what is important and essential in my daily life. In fact, because I was not able to speak Cantonese, I learned to communicate with my eyes, my hands, my smile: in a word, with my heart. Words are not important, not understanding is not important. The most important is to be there with them. Being present is not only being physically there but also being there with your heart, all your heart. Without any words, it is impossible to lie about your feelings, because there are no words to explain. The only way is to be true to yourself and to create true friendship with others. For that, you have to put aside your own troubles and let joy and happiness appear.

– *Bro. Côme de Jenlis, volunteer in Hong Kong with the Foreign Missionaries of Paris*

## The values of hospitality and faith in God

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THE ELDERLY in terms of faith, values and life lessons? What a thought provoking question! As I look back on the many rich experiences with my family elders, I saw how the values of hospitality and faith in God saturated their daily activities. The desire to pray, attend Mass and include others in wholesome fun was so evident. They were faithful to financial giving and serving others. This gave them a deep satisfaction and joy.

Perhaps this strong foundation of values enabled me to start volunteering and attending Mass at St. Martin's Home in Baltimore. I enjoyed meeting the Residents and came to love my Wednesdays volunteering in the arts and crafts room.

One particular incident struck me so deeply as I worked with residents on an art project. Alban, a wheelchair bound Resident with many physical limitations, opened up a discussion with others in the room as to what they were going to give up for the Lenten season.

Wow, I was amazed that these elderly who had given up so much would be willing to give up even more for the love of God. The sacrificial desire of their hearts was such a witness to me! They persevere through so much difficulty, yet they still want to give more to God and others.

The passage from Sirach 2:2-6 sums up how they live their lives. I believe this is their life lesson.

*"Be sincere of heart and steadfast, undisturbed in time of adversity. Cling to him, forsake him not; thus will your future be great. Accept what befalls you, in crushing misfortune be patient; for in fire gold is tested, and worthy men in the crucible of humiliation. Trust God and he will help you; make straight your ways and hope in him."*

Thanks to the Residents and the Little Sisters, I have since become a member of the Association of Jeanne Jugan, where I continue to grow in learning about poverty of spirit. ☩

– Irene Eagan, A.J.J., Baltimore, Maryland

# My journey of faith

by Tim Gomez, Melbourne, Australia

*Faith expands our hearts in hope,  
and enables us to bear life-giving witness*  
(Pope Benedict XVI)

FOR ME, AS FOR MANY PEOPLE, my story of faith owes so much to by parents. The way that their faith influenced their whole-hearted acceptance of the will of God in their lives — first of all as individuals, then as a married couple, then as parents, even as widowed, and always as a part of the Catholic community — was very significant in my life.

One doesn't know all these things as a child, but later I was told of Dad's faith and his trust in God when he was suddenly widowed and was a solo parent to four daughters and two sons aged from 16 to 4. The custom in our families involved marrying a relative, which he did two years later. My mother had thought of a life for herself as a religious but circumstances and the community assured her that God had other plans. Her own offering of a charitable faith-filled, outgoing trusting disposition meant that she readily accepted this position as from God. Her instant family of six children grew by her having four sons and a daughter of her own.

As I grew older I came to appreciate the depth of Dad's faith. He was quite involved with the Jesuit priests and parishes in the mission stations of the tea growing areas of Sri Lanka. There are many services to be organized for the workers in tea-plantations, but Dad's was a special one. On Sundays he organized the tea es-

tate trucks to bring the Catholics to church for Mass and arranged breakfast for them.

His mission involvement led to helping to start a Catholic English School run by the Holy Angel nuns. I was one of the first students and made my First Communion and was an altar server for a number of years. Later on my younger brothers did the same. In one sense none of these events should have been any surprise, because I learned that Dad's eldest brother and cousin were working in India as Jesuit missionaries.

At the same time that all this was happening, there were other influences for girls. Little Sisters of the Poor used to visit the tea estate areas for donations from the British companies, and they came into contact with the girls in our families, with the result that one of my sisters, an aunt and a cousin became interested and all three decided to join the Little Sisters. Their probation period was served locally and then they went to Europe for their Novitiate and vows. This was a very big event in the Gomez family.

For secondary school I was moved to the de La Salle Brothers school 100 miles away. At this Boarding College there was plenty of faith encouragement. There was daily Mass, Confession on Fridays, Catechism classes, Benediction etc. Meanwhile other members of the family were joining religious orders. Two more cousins, my youngest sister and two nieces joined the Little Sisters, while six others joined other orders of nuns. Three more cousins joined the Jesuits and one the Redemptorists.

With all these relatives joining religious orders one could be excused for thinking there was pressure on me too. I did want to live a life of faith, to be settled in what I did. To that end and with the help of some Jesuits and the Little Sisters, I was able to organize a personal pilgrimage and visited Rome, Lourdes, Belgium and other places. At the end of that time I was invited to teach at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta run by the Jesuits. I felt at ease and settled in, grateful to God.

For my mother, though, there was more to being settled and



**Tim and Chloe Gomez, Melbourne, Australia.**

she threw out a good many hints that my life would not be properly at ease until I found a suitable partner. I had gone as far as being friendly with the daughter of a colleague but wasn't sure of my next step. An old friend, Mother Hedwige of the Little Sisters, was passing through Calcutta, and we arranged for her to meet me and the girl, Chloe. After a while Mother Hedwige told me "she's the one; go ahead in confidence." That gave me a settled mind and I thanked God and Mother Hedwige for the gift of Chloe.

Our wedding was interesting. My mother, brother and a nephew were my relatives and some of Chloe's relatives, and there were 25 Jesuits, Chloe's Girl Guides, and the Choir from St Xavier's College. From the Church we went to the Little Sisters Home to meet Sr Marie, an Irish missionary who had known me since my First Communion and continued praying for me.

Blessed Cardinal Newman said "To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often." This was true for Chloe and me. After three years of a very settled life we received a letter from the

Brothers of the Sacred Heart offering me a teaching position at St John's College near Melbourne. We were quite stunned and unsure. My mother, who was visiting at the time, said "It is God's will, go with His blessing."

There was another issue in our lives. We were married for four years and childless; our thought was to adopt a child. We were not sure of the long drawn out process. Faith tells us that it was Providence that arranged for Mother Teresa to be in Melbourne in 1973 for the Eucharistic Congress. Chloe and I went to see her to discuss our situation. She heard us out and placed her hand on us and said "It will work out, go ahead." We went ahead and it did work out.

When I reflect on the role that faith has played in my life, which is now our life, I understand better why John Newton sang of "The Amazing Grace" that had led him thus far and, he prayed, to lead him home. That thought, though, can become too passive, as though people themselves are not involved. There is an active commitment, too, that is best summed up in the words of the mystical Secretary to the United Nations, Dag Hammerskjold, "For all that has been. Thanks! To all that will be, Yes." 

## Mother General visits Irish and Belgian provinces

THROUGHOUT HER YEARS AS SUPERIOR GENERAL, Mother Celine de la Visitation has covered many miles visiting Little Sisers and Residents around the world. In 2013 she made two trips which were fairly close to home, visiting Ireland and the province of Brussels/Lille, which includes homes in Belgium and the northernmost region of France.

The trip to Ireland began on September 16, 2013, when Mother General and her companion, Mother Assistant Gerard Patricia, arrived at our home of Dublin-Raheny, which serves as the provincial residence for the Irish province. Mother Celine was happy to greet the Little Sisters and Residents, as well as staff members, Association Jeanne Jugan members and their families and over ninety volunteers.

Two days later Mother General traveled from Dublin south to Ferrybank, a suburb of Waterford, where she was able to see

one of our newest homes. Mass there was celebrated by Bishop Séamus Freeman, bishop of Ossory and the cousin of a Little Sister.

Several days of meetings with the superiors of





Ferrybank

the Irish province followed back in Dublin, and then Mother Celine concluded her trip with a visit to our second home in Ireland's capital, which is under the patronage of the Holy Family.



From mid-October to mid-November Mother General and Mother Assistant Patricia Yvonne visited the province of Brussels-Lille. Their four-week journey took them to numerous homes in two countries, where they experienced the specialties, customs and histories of each locale.

In the Belgian capital of Brussels, our travelers were greeted by "Charles V," a powerful monarch in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and his wife. Four days later they crossed back into France, arriving in Amiens, where they were welcomed by Residents representing the local "market gardeners" who work in the city's numerous marshes, which are used for farming.

Brussels



The Residents of the home of Escaudoeuvres entertained Mother Celine with a performance of the life of St. Jeanne Jugan and the history of the home.

In Valenciennes, Mother General was welcomed by Resident "miners" repre-

Escaudoeuvres



Valenciennes

senting a major element of the local economy. The visit was confided to Notre Dame du Saint Cordon, who saved the city from a plague in 1008 by surrounding it with a crimson cord unwound by an angel.



Dunkirk



La Madeleine

On October 30<sup>th</sup> our travelers arrived in La Madeleine, where they were greeted by a giant doll named Magdeleine who usually greets visitors at the Town Hall. The city's mayor was on hand to give a speech, along with a Resident who had worked very hard to offer words of welcome in English.

Mother General's next stop was Dunkirk, where she was introduced to local traditions associated with sailing. The Residents performed a play about "Our Lady of the Dunes," a miraculous statue of Our Lady which was discovered buried in the sand as the ramparts of the city of Dunkirk were being fortified in 1403. She is still carried in procession by women in the traditional costume of that time.

Montignies



Namur



From Dunkirk Mother General and her companion returned to Belgium and the city of Antwerp, where they were welcomed with a song in Dutch, given a generous gift of Belgian chocolates

and other regional specialties, and then enjoyed a concert in Flemish. On November 8<sup>th</sup> they continued on to our home in Montignies.

Mother Celine's final stop was Namur, which celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year. During her visit there the Residents performed a program comprised of a play on the life of St. Jeanne Jugan, dances, songs and the reading of poetry. Mother was also presented with an original icon of our foundress.

Our travelers finally returned to the motherhouse on November 14<sup>th</sup>, happy to have met so many Little Sisters, Residents and friends of our homes who continue to live out the family spirit so dear to St. Jeanne Jugan. 💚

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## Nursing assistant wins caregiver award



THE RALSTON CENTER is a pioneering advocate for the aging in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Each year its Caregiver Award encourages “quality of life in aging” through a very personal and focused acknowledgement of Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs) who exemplify the highest standards of compassion, commitment and excellent care. Katherine Major, a nursing assistant from our home in Philadelphia, was honored with the Caregiver Award this past October. She has been caring for the Residents of Holy Family Home for thirty years. “Simply put,” wrote our Little Sisters, “Katherine Major is a wonderful C.N.A.!”

One of the home’s Residents wrote the following poem to honor Katherine:

### “KATHERINE”

Katherine gets all of us ready for the day  
She treats each one of us in a special way  
Always seems to know just what we need  
And can get everything done with maximum speed!!  
Katherine’s good for a laugh to start the day  
Usually for something I had to say  
Probably about an incident I had  
When we laughed we decided, it wasn’t so bad!!  
In my opinion, Katherine, you deserve a prize  
For taking good care of us “guys”

*– From Mary “O” and all your friends at Holy Family Home!*

## Happenings here and there



### Our Residents are winners too!

ON DECEMBER 11, 2013, a group of Residents from St. Joseph's Home in Totowa, New Jersey, participated in a senior talent show sponsored by the Canterbury Nursing Home and the Twilight Wish Foundation. The Foundation, established by Canterbury's activities director, is dedicated to "honor and enrich the lives of deserving seniors through wish granting celebrations that connect generations." The Residents' hand bell choir earned third place, while their choral group, the Razzle Dazzle Rockers, placed fifth in the competition. The joy of participating was the best prize for all!

Elizabeth S. Herrera, a Resident of St. Anne's Home in San Francisco, took up poetry when she came to the home. Her poem, *A Bridge for Life* (published in Serenity no. 157), advanced to the semi-final round of the 2013 National Amateur Poetry Competition. As a semi-finalist, Elizabeth's work will be featured in *This Time Around*, a multi-volume collection showcasing the work of new and notable poets from around the world.



## "Connected 2013," Dunedin

"CONNECTED 2013" was a one day intergenerational faith event held on September 21, 2013 at our home in Dunedin, New Zealand. Young people from parishes throughout the diocese came to the home to pray, hear testimonies, share with the elderly and learn about the Little Sisters of the Poor. A core team of organizers was drawn from the Jesus Youth New Zealand movement. This is how they explained their inspiration for the event:

"Oftentimes life seems too hard, but God has a plan for us all, and when we conquer these difficulties, our crosses of pain will become crosses of victory. These types of burdens and crosses are often a way of life for elderly people. They are often trapped, alone, and feel neglected at this important time of physical and spiritual need. What a world of difference it would make if young people, with their vigor and enthusiasm, were to understand their crosses and at least help carry some of the load of that cross!"

This central idea inspired us to bring the spirit of WYD 2013 from Rio to our city of Dunedin. We wanted to recognize the plight of the elderly and allow them to communicate and share their thoughts and wisdom with youth. This idea was also in perfect harmony with the mission of St. Jeanne Jugan and the Little Sisters of the Poor."

## National Catholic Youth Festival, Melbourne

THE FIRST-EVER AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC YOUTH FESTIVAL, celebrated December 5–7, 2013, was an initiative of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference. The purpose of the festival was to bring young people together to deepen their relationship with Jesus, be empowered to be disciples in the world today and encounter and celebrate the vitality of the Church in Australia.

Young people from Year 9 to 25 years of age were invited to the event, which was held in Melbourne. 3,500 young people participated.

Little Sisters from our communities in Melbourne and Sydney formed a group to provide our presence at the “Incounter Expo.” A quiz, jumbled captions, and two



short videos were programmed into six laptops and Festival participants were invited to try their luck. Sample bags with information about St. Jeanne Jugan assisted in finding the correct answer. A spiritual Treasure Chest of recent writings of Pope Francis, linked with sayings of St. Jeanne Jugan, invited the youth to “dip in” and find their treasure.

To say that the Festival was a success is an understatement. To see this large gathering of young people serious, sincere and enthusiastic about living their faith and giving their lives to Jesus gives great hope for the future!



## Retracing their steps in life's journey of faith

During the Year of Faith the Residents of Queen of Peace Residence,

Queens Village, NY, had the opportunity of making a pilgrimage to the church of their baptism, or to a parish that had been important in their life of faith. These visits extended from Bay Ridge (Brooklyn) to Oyster Bay, since all of Long Island comprised the diocese of Brooklyn in the years when the Residents were born.

No two Residents requested to visit the same church! These pilgrimages thus became an afternoon of one-to-one attention. Some of the priests and parish secretaries had prepared gifts for the Residents: statues of the parish patron, books about parish celebrations and anniversaries and copies of their baptismal certificates complete with the parish seal.

It was particularly moving to accompany Frank Herbert (pictured above) to the Church of St. Pancras in Glendale, where he had been baptized 95 years ago! The baptismal font was the same, although it had been moved to the sanctuary. With a lighted candle in his hand Frank renewed his baptismal promises in a strong voice and affirmed the faith that his godparents had asked for him nearly a century ago. Frank reminisced how his father's business had raised the original pipe organ to its place in the choir loft.

Following the pilgrimage each Resident received photos of the experience, a copy of the baptismal promises renewed and the candle that he or she had held. What a grace it was to witness such perseverance in the faith among the elderly! 🕊



## *Beauty's Rose*

Through aged and twinkling eyes, I can tell  
The joy and pain of a life lived well  
Through crooked smiles and wrinkled skin,  
I experience the world that we live in;  
The love, the faith, the pain and sorrow,  
That gives me strength to face my tomorrow  
Those words of encouragement and the hand in mine  
Connects our generations; two souls intertwined  
I learn to love, to be patient and to trust,  
From the sage, gentle flames that enlighten the dusk;  
I learn to have faith, to let go and have Grace,  
For those eyes are looking out from God's Living Face.

– Zara Maria Ramathas  
Volunteer, Dunedin, New Zealand

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Baltimore, MD  
Permit No. 7175

# Serenity

JANUARY 2014, No. 161

PUBLICATIONS OFFICE  
LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR  
601 MAIDEN CHOICE LANE  
BALTIMORE, MD 21228-3698  
[www.littlesistersofthepoor.org](http://www.littlesistersofthepoor.org)

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everyone is important  
and necessary.