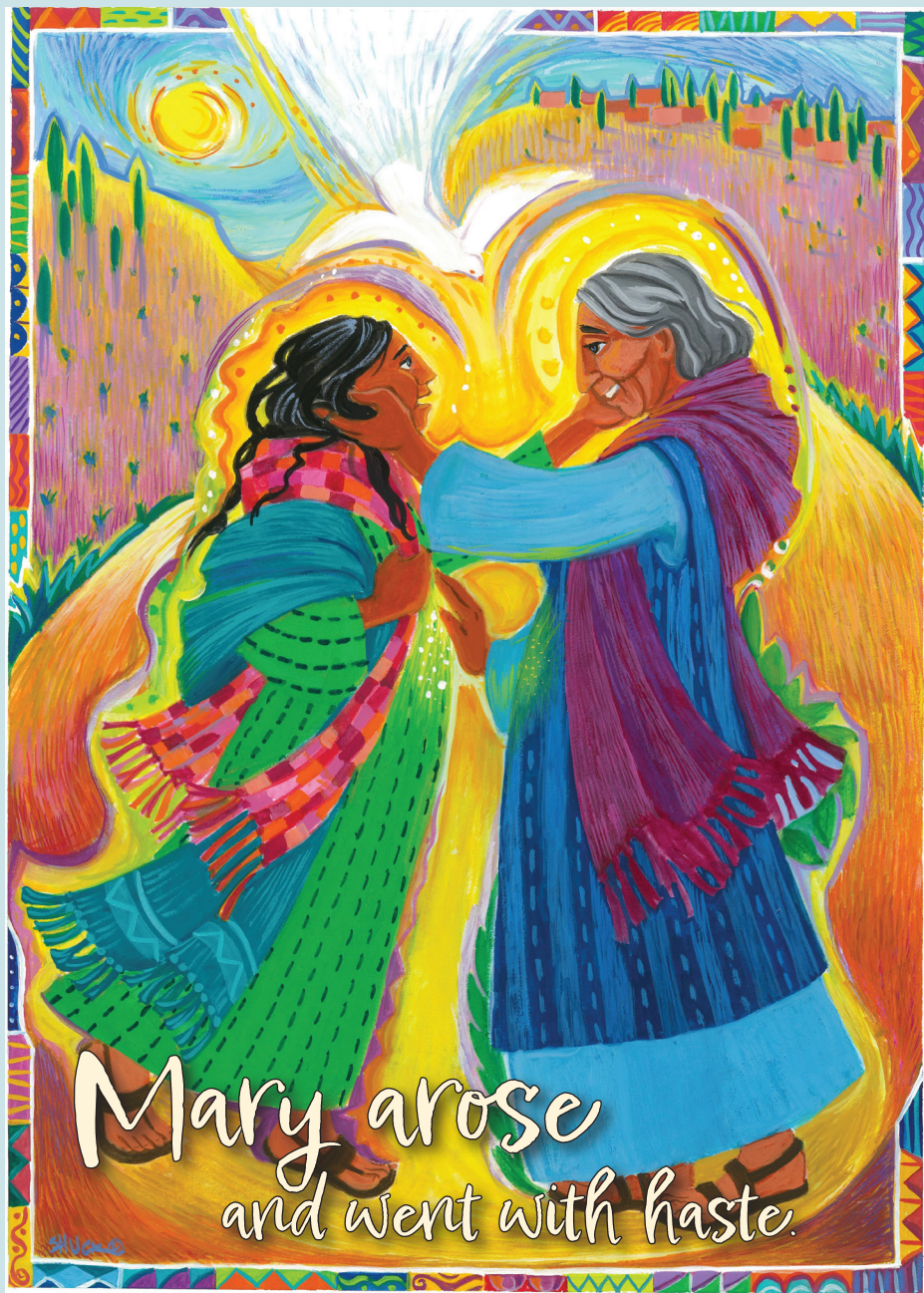


Serenity

no. 198 • Little Sisters of the Poor • April 2023



Mary arose
and went with haste.



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 Photos

Front cover image: Mary & Elizabeth, by Vicki Shuck, used with permission.

Back inside cover: Canticle of Mary, by Jen Norton, used with permission.

Back outside cover: Midshipmen from the U.S. Naval Academy visit the Residents of Jeanne Jugan Residence, Washington, D.C.; here with Judy Keller.

Serenity

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Rise up and go forth, “le coeur sur la main”

Later this year Pope Francis will meet with young people in Lisbon, Portugal, for World Youth Day. With this issue of *Serenity* we're setting off on this journey a bit early — many of us are older and so it might take us longer to get there, but we don't want to miss this opportunity to pilgrimage with the Pope! In the words of Francis himself, “the Lord pushes us to go out towards the light, to let him lead us across the threshold of all of our closed doors.... We too, as disciples of the Lord and the Christian community, are called to get up quickly, to enter into the mystery of the resurrection, and to let the Lord guide us along the paths that he wishes to point out to us.”

After focusing on the mystery of the Annunciation during the 2018 World Youth Day in Panama, Pope Francis has proposed the Visitation as this year's WYD theme. “The Mother of the Lord is a model for young people on the move, who refuse to stand in front of a mirror to contemplate themselves or to get caught up in the ‘net,’” our Holy Father wrote. “Mary's focus is always directed outwards. She is the woman of Easter, in a permanent state of exodus, going forth from herself towards that great Other who is God and towards others, her brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest need, like her cousin Elizabeth.”

In the Visitation, as described by Pope Francis, we see Mary as the exemplar of a Christian disciple — she was the *first and greatest disciple*, after all — always ready to follow the Lord and do his will, always at the service of others. We are all called to go forth from ourselves, no matter our age.

Mother Celine de la Visitation, our recently deceased Superior General, whom we remember in this issue, was just such a follower of Christ — joyful, always turned towards others, inspiring confidence and joy in us, her spiritual daughters.



© Jen Norton

A fellow Superior General with whom she had collaborated for several years shared that Mother Celine had “le coeur sur la main,” a French expression whose literal translation is “to have the heart on the hand.” It means to be kind and generous, to have a heart of gold. This expression perfectly describes Mother Celine!

In *Thank you, Mimi*, we meet Colette Laffly, a beloved member of our extended Little Sisters of the Poor family, who also had “le coeur sur la main.” Colette, who died at 97 ½, is eulogized by her granddaughter Caroline, who shows us the beauty of intergenerational love.

In *Death defying, life affirming*, a Little Sister shares our pro-life convictions, the challenges we are currently facing, and why being a Little Sister of the Poor is worth it! ©



Message of Pope Francis for World Youth Day 2023

“Mary arose and went with haste” (Lk 1:39)

Dear Young People!

The theme of the Panama World Youth Day was, “I am the servant of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38). After that event, we resumed our journey towards a new destination — Lisbon 2023 — with hearts afire with God’s urgent summons to arise. In 2020, we meditated on Jesus’s words: “Young man, I say to you, arise!” (Lk 7:14). Last year too, we were inspired by the figure of the Apostle Paul, to whom the Risen Lord said: “Arise! I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen” (cf. Acts 26:16). Along the route we still need to travel before arriving in Lisbon, we will have at our side the Virgin of Nazareth who, immediately after the Annunciation, “arose and went with haste” (Lk 1:39). Common to these three themes is the word: “arise!” It is a word that also — let us remember — speaks to us of getting up from our slumber, waking up to the life all around us.

In these troubling times, when our human family, already tested by the trauma of the pandemic, is racked by the tragedy of war, Mary shows all of us, and especially you, young people like herself, the path of proximity and encounter. I hope and I firmly believe that the experience many of you will have in Lisbon next August will represent a new beginning for you, the young, and — with you — for humanity as a whole.

Mary arose

After the Annunciation, Mary could have focused on herself and her own worries and fears about her new condition. Instead, she entrusted herself completely to God. Her thoughts turned to Elizabeth. She got up and went forth, into the world of life and movement. Even though the astonishing message of the angel had caused a seismic shift in her plans, the young Mary did not remain paralyzed, for within her was Jesus, the power of resurrection and new life. Within herself, Mary already bore the Lamb that was slain and yet lives. She arises and sets out, for she is certain that God's plan is the best plan for her life. Mary becomes a temple of God, an image of the pilgrim Church, a Church that goes forth for service, a Church that brings the good news to all!

To experience the presence of the risen Christ in our own lives, to encounter him “alive,” is the greatest spiritual joy, an explosion of light that can leave no one untouched. Mary sets out immediately, anxious to bring the news to others, to bear witness to the joy of this encounter. This too is what caused the haste of the first disciples following the resurrection: “[the women] left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples” (Mt 28:8).

In the accounts of the resurrection, we often encounter two words: “awake” and “arise.” With them, the Lord pushes us to go out towards the light, to let him lead us across the threshold of all of our closed doors. “This image has great meaning for the Church. We too, as disciples of the Lord and the Christian community, are called to get up quickly, to enter into the mystery of the resurrection, and to let



At Queen of Peace Residence, Queens Village, New York, elderly and youth participate in a Rock-a-thon to raise funds for several young people who will be sponsored by the Little Sisters as pilgrims to World Youth Day. The young women are students at Kellenburg Memorial High School, which regularly sends students to the Home as volunteers.

the Lord guide us along the paths that he wishes to point out to us”
(*Homily for the Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul*, 29 June 2022).

The Mother of the Lord is a model for young people on the move, who refuse to stand in front of a mirror to contemplate themselves or to get caught up in the “net.” Mary’s focus is always directed outwards. She is the woman of Easter, in a permanent state of exodus, going forth from herself towards that great Other who is God and towards others, her brothers and sisters, especially those in greatest need, like her cousin Elizabeth.

... and went with haste

Saint Ambrose of Milan, in his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, writes that Mary set out in haste towards the hills, “because she rejoiced in the promise and sought to serve others with the enthusiasm born of her joy. Full of God, where else could she have gone if not



Residents in Washington, D.C. recently enjoyed a visit from Midshipmen from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, a joyful day for old and young alike.

immediately of some reason not to get involved? Or do I show interest and willingness to help?" To be sure, you cannot resolve all the problems of the world. Yet you can begin with the problems of those closest to you, with the needs of your own community. Someone once told Mother Teresa: "What you are doing is a mere drop in the ocean." She replied: "But if I didn't do it, that ocean would have one drop less."

When faced with concrete and urgent needs, we need to act quickly. How many people in our world look forward to a visit from someone who is concerned about them! How many of the elderly, the sick, the imprisoned and refugees have need of a look of sympathy, a visit from a brother or sister who scales the walls of indifference!

towards the heights? The grace of the Holy Spirit permits no delay." Mary's haste is thus a sign of her desire to serve, to proclaim her joy, to respond without hesitation to the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was motivated by the needs of her elderly cousin. She did not hold back, or remain indifferent. She thought more of others than of herself. And this gave enthusiasm and direction to her life. Each of you can ask:

"How do I react to the needs that I see all around me? Do I think

What kinds of “haste” do you have, dear young people? What leads you to feel a need to get up and go, lest you end up standing still? Many people — in the wake of realities like the pandemic, war, forced migration, poverty, violence and climate disasters — are asking themselves: Why is this happening to me? Why me? And why now? But the real question in life is instead: for whom am I living? (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 286).

The haste of the young woman of Nazareth is the haste of those who have received extraordinary gifts from the Lord and feel compelled to share them, to let the immense grace that they have experienced be poured out upon others. It is the haste of those capable of putting other people’s needs above their own. Mary is an example of a young person who wastes no time on seeking attention or the approval of others — as often happens when we depend on our “likes” on social media. She sets out to find the most genuine of all “connections”: the one that comes from encounter, sharing, love and service.

Starting with the Annunciation, when she first set out to visit her cousin, Mary has never stopped bridging time and space to visit those of her sons and daughters who need her loving help. Our own journey, if “inhabited” by God, can lead us straight into the heart of every one of our brothers and sisters. How many testimonies have we heard from people who were “visited” by Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother! In how many far-off places of the earth, in every age — through apparitions and special graces — has Mary visited her people! There is practically no place on earth that she has not visited. The Mother of God moves in the midst of her people by tender and loving care; she makes her own their anxieties and troubles. And wherever there is a shrine, a church or a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, there her children flock in great numbers. Think of all those expressions of popular piety! Pilgrimages, festivities, prayers, the enthronement of images in houses and so many other acts of devotion are concrete examples of a vital relationship between the Mother of the Lord and her people, who visit one another in turn!

Healthy haste drives us always upwards and towards others

A healthy haste drives us always upwards and towards others. Yet there is also an unhealthy haste, which can drive us to live superficially and to take everything lightly. Without commitment or concern, without investing ourselves in what we do. It is the haste of those who live, study, work and socialize without any real personal investment. This can happen in interpersonal relationships. In families, when we never stop to listen and spend time with others. In friendships, when we expect our friends to keep us entertained and fulfil our needs, but immediately look the other way if we see that they are troubled and need our time and help. Even among couples in love, few have the patience to really get to know and understand each other. We can have the same attitude in school, at work and in other areas of our daily lives. When things are done in haste, they tend not to be fruitful. They risk remaining barren and lifeless. As we read in the book of Proverbs: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to want” (21:5).

When Mary arrives at the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth, a marvellous encounter takes place! Elizabeth herself had experienced miraculous intervention from God, who gave her a child in her old age. She would have had every reason to begin by talking about herself, yet she was not “full of herself,” but anxious to welcome her young cousin and the fruit of her womb. As soon as she heard Mary’s greeting, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. Such surprises and outpourings of the Spirit come about when we show true hospitality, when we put others, not ourselves, at the center. We see this too in the story of Zacchaeus. In the Gospel of Luke we read that “when Jesus came to the place [where Zacchaeus was], he looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.’ So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him” (19:5-6).

Many of us have had the unexpected experience of meeting Jesus and for the first time having a sense of closeness and respect, a lack of prejudice and disapproval, a loving gaze that we never encountered



in any other. Not only that. We have also realized that, for Jesus, it was not enough to glimpse us from afar; he wanted to be with us and to share his life with us. The joy of this experience made us hasten to welcome him, to feel the need to be with him and to get to know him better. Elizabeth and Zechariah welcomed Mary and Jesus into their home. Let us learn from these two elderly persons the meaning of hospitality! Ask your parents and grandparents, and the oldest members of your communities, what it meant for them to have welcomed God and others into their lives. You will benefit from hearing the experiences of those who have gone before you.

Dear young people, now is the time to set out in haste towards concrete encounters, towards genuine acceptance of those different from ourselves. This was the case with the young Mary and the elderly Elizabeth. Only thus will we bridge distances — between generations, social classes, ethnic and other groups — and even put an end to wars. Young people always represent the hope for new unity within our fragmented and divided human family. But only if they can preserve memory, only if they can hear the dramas and dreams of the elderly. “It is no coincidence that war is returning to Europe at a time

when the generation that experienced it in the last century is dying out” (*Message for the 2022 World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly*). We need the covenant between young and old, lest we forget the lessons of history; we need to overcome all the forms of polarization and extremism present in today’s world.

Saint Paul, writing to the Ephesians, announced that, “now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (2:13-14). Jesus is God’s response to the challenges facing humanity in every age. Mary carries that response within her when she goes to visit Elizabeth. The greatest gift that Mary brings to her elderly kinswoman is that of Jesus himself. Certainly, the concrete assistance she offered was most valuable. Yet nothing could have filled the house of Zechariah with such great joy and satisfaction as the presence of Jesus in the womb of the Virgin, now a tabernacle of the living God. In that mountain village, Jesus, by his mere presence and without uttering a word, preached his first “Sermon on the Mount.” He silently proclaimed the beatitude of the poor and the meek who trust in God’s mercy.

My message for you, dear young people, the great message entrusted to the Church is Jesus! Yes, Jesus himself, in his infinite love for each of us, his salvation and the new life he has bestowed upon us. Mary is our model; she shows us how to welcome this immense gift into our lives, to share it with others, and thus to bring Christ, his compassionate love and his generous service to our deeply wounded humanity.

All together to Lisbon!

Mary was a young woman, like many of you. She was one of us. An Italian Bishop, Don Tonino Bello, addressed this prayer to her: “Holy Mary..., we know very well that you were destined to sail the ocean deep. If we beg you to hug the coast, it is not because we want to hold you back, but because, seeing your closeness to the shores of

our discouragement, we come to see that we too are called to venture out, as you did, upon the high seas of freedom” (*Maria, donna dei nostri giorni*, Cinisello Balsamo, 2012, 12-13).

It was from Portugal, as I mentioned in the first Message of this trilogy, that in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries great numbers of young people — including many missionaries — set out for worlds unknown, not least to share their experience of Jesus with other peoples and nations (cf. *Message for the 2020 World Youth Day*). To that land, at the dawn of the twentieth century, Mary chose to make a special visit. From Fatima, she addressed to people of all ages the powerful and magnificent message of God’s love, which summons us to conversion and to true freedom. Once more, I invite each of you to take part in the great intercontinental pilgrimage of young people that will culminate in the celebration of World Youth Day in Lisbon next August. I also want to remind you that next November 20, the Solemnity of Christ the King, we will celebrate World Youth Day in local Churches throughout the world. In this regard, the recent document of the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life — *Pastoral Guidelines for the Celebration of World Youth Day in the Particular Churches* — can be of great help to all those engaged in the pastoral care of young people.

Dear young people, it is my dream that at World Youth Day you will be able to experience anew the joy of encountering God and our brothers and sisters. After a long period of social distancing and isolation, we will all rediscover in Lisbon — with God’s help — the joy of a fraternal embrace between peoples and generations, an embrace of reconciliation and peace, an embrace of new missionary fraternity! May the Holy Spirit kindle in your hearts a desire to “arise” and the joy of journeying together, in synodal fashion, leaving behind all false frontiers. Now is the time to arise! Like Mary, let us “arise and go in haste.” Let us carry Jesus within our hearts, and bring him to all those whom we meet! In this beautiful season of your lives, press ahead and do not postpone all the good that the Holy Spirit can accomplish in you! With affection, I bless your dreams and every step of your journey. ☺



With her heart on her hand: Mother Celine and the Visitation

We have seen how Pope Francis placed the mystery of Mary's Visitation to her elderly cousin at the center of this year's World Youth Day. The Visitation was also a central theme in the life of our recently deceased Superior General, Mother Celine de la Visitation. Although she had not chosen this name for herself, but was given her religious name by the Mother General at the time, she grew to embody the spirit of this mystery.

In our last issue of *Serenity* we announced Mother Celine's passing on December 3, 2022. In this issue we would like to share some of the testimonials sent to the motherhouse by Little Sisters and various other people who knew her. We can honestly say that Mother Celine was loved and appreciated by everyone who met her thanks to her joy, her openness and her ability to accept others just as they were. She lived the spirituality of encounter — which is also the spirit of the Visitation — long before Pope Francis began speaking about it. Mother Celine cared deeply about the young Little Sisters and young women joining our Congregation; she often remembered the names even of those who had not yet entered, but who were just discerning their vocation! Many of us feel her presence with us still; we are confident that her memory and her power to influence others will extend far beyond her earthly life.

When Mother Celine returned to the United States from France following her second novitiate and perpetual profession she was responsible for the initial formation of our postulants in Baltimore for about ten years. The regular volleyball games played on the backyard



Mother Celine in 1963 and as Mother General, in 2012.

court during this period are legendary. Later in her life she enjoyed teasing the Sisters she had known as postulants, reminding them, “I knew you when you were babies!” One of them shared, “She was so loved by all of us ... She could be serious, but she was also a lot of fun. Her joy was exuberant.”

During her early years in Baltimore Mother Celine was also responsible for training the seminarians who came to the Home for pastoral formation. She was practical in her approach, putting them to work doing everything from buffing the floors to bathing and shaving the elderly men. There are still priests in various religious communities who remember the training they received from her as young men.

Many years later, as Superior General Mother Celine accepted an appeal from Archbishop Pierre d’Ornellas of Rennes to help him establish a pre-seminary for the eleven dioceses in the West of France. She was happy to offer the archbishop a house on the motherhouse property that had been used for the Little Sisters’ families. The building was renovated, a chapel added, and by 2008 young men discerning a vocation to the priesthood were making La Tour their home for a year.



Mother Celine with Residents in Lisbon, Portugal, 2004.

“What a spirit of hospitality and openness to the needs of the Church!” commented our current Mother General in looking back on that period. “However, it was not entirely selfless. She was counting on these young men to become good priests and friends of the Congregation, who would direct many young women our way!”

This is just one example of Mother Celine’s openness towards others. Numerous consecrated women and men from other communities attended her funeral, sharing their appreciation for her support and example. A former Superior General with whom she collaborated for many years in a group for religious superiors sent her personal testimony: “In my exchanges with Mother Celine I could sense her intention to seek the happiness of the Little Sisters, and her concern for the well-being of the people welcomed in the Homes. I also perceived her concern for young people, by preparing for vocations. I will not forget her warm, fraternal welcome and her kindness ... She had ‘her heart on her hand,’ ready to give and to help.”

Mother Celine’s warmth and kindness, noted by so many, were surely the fruit of her spiritual life. She often invited the Little Sisters

to experience each of their encounters as a visitation. Like the Virgin Mary, whom she loved deeply, she was fully at the service of God and neighbor, combining simplicity with generosity. This gift of herself was rooted in the consecration to Mary that she had made during her novitiate according to the text of Saint Louis-Marie Grignion de Montfort, and in her membership in the Legion of Mary in her youth.

The Virgin Mary became her model, her guide in the following of Christ. Like a Marian seal on her life, Mother Celine passed away on the first Saturday of the month. Her farewell Mass took place a few hours before the Church celebrated First Vespers of the Immaculate Conception.

Each Mother General of our Congregation writes several spiritually-oriented letters, called circulars, to the Little Sisters each year. These are a vehicle for uniting the communities around the world in a common prayer or spiritual orientation. In her years as Superior General Mother Celine often wrote about Our Lady.

Mother Celine referred to the Visitation in the circular she wrote for her first feast day as Superior General in May 1997: "Let us admire Mary's haste; it is the eagerness of love. The 'yes' of Mary's faith blossoms in the 'yes' of love: Mary placed herself at the service of her cousin. We too must follow Mary's example by living our vow of hospitality. The more we live within with Jesus, the more we will be able to recognize and serve him, with humility and eagerness, in others."

In June 2000, Mother Celine spoke of the implications of the Visitation in our life: "It is often so difficult for us to 'remain' where the Lord wants us to be, in the present moment! We are so easily in a hurry or agitated! Let us ask Mary to teach us how 'to remain' in prayer, absorbed in the Lord, abandoning to him our worries and concerns, but also 'to remain' with the people with whom we are in contact, both in community and in our hospitaller life. Our relationships will be enriched by qualities of listening, mutual respect, serenity... Consequently, our daily encounters will become more like 'Visitations,' during which Jesus, present in us, will visit all the people that we meet."

(continued on page 18)



Toward the future...

Undeterred by the decrease in the number of Little Sisters, Mother Celine went ahead with foundation projects to welcome the poorest elderly. In April 1997, she traveled to Korea to encourage the three new foundations in Seoul, Chonju, and Kwangju. Then in January 1998, she went to Benin to plan the foundation of a house and a novitiate in Cotonou. That same year, she agreed to take over an existing house in Osorno, Chile. At the end of 2002, she sent Little Sisters to respond to the Bishop's invitation for a foundation in Cartago, Colombia. Then in March 2003, she herself left for Manila to study the possibility of a foundation in the Philippines. 2004 saw the beginning of a foundation in Jabalpur, India. In 2006, she sent Mother Provincial of Chile-Argentina to Peru in view of a foundation, which became a reality the following year in Tacna. In the same year, a house and a novitiate were founded in Bolinao, the Philippines. The construction of a second foundation in Benin began in 2014.

What audacity and confidence in the future, in Providence... Little Sisters are needed to care for the elderly received into our Homes, so with what ardor she prayed for good, fervent and solid vocations! Each young girl she met was, for her, a future Little Sister!



Opposite: With the archbishop of Cotonou, Benin, 1998.

Top: Visiting the construction site of a new house in South Korea, 1997.

Middle: Meeting young neighbors in Manila, the Philippines, 2003.

Bottom: Visiting India, 2011.



In May 2009, Mother Celine wrote, “During this year of the Canonization of our Mother, let us prepare — with the help of Mary — by living our life as Little Sisters of the Poor with a total self-giving. As we reflect on the feast of the Visitation of Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, we realize how much Mary must have lived a profound and practical faith in the circumstances of her existence. She let God take care of everything. We, too, must learn to live by faith with Mary. Today, our Homes must function in conformity with so many different regulations, but with Mary’s help, we manage to deal with all this in order to provide good care for the Residents. Let us ask for the grace of fidelity to the charism of Jeanne Jugan, by keeping the seal of simplicity and joy in our community life.”

We cited Mother Celine’s first feast day circular; her last is also noteworthy. In May 2015 she wrote, “Humility and littleness require that we be ready to do anything that is asked of us. Our self-giving is what facilitates community life. As Mother Marie Antoinette de la Trinité used to say, “We must be mindful of the humble realities of daily life, finding joy in the hidden labors of our vocation, as did the Blessed Virgin. She was the handmaid who did the cleaning and the cooking, all the ordinary tasks. We should be happy to share these humble labors, which were part of the life of the Holy Family of Nazareth, and which our Mother accomplished throughout her life.”

The reflections of several Little Sisters who lived with Mother Celine sum up how she lived this Marian orientation on a daily basis. “For me, Mother Celine was a true picture of a ‘happy and welcoming Little Sister’ with a remarkable smile. Her childlike simplicity, compassion, motherly affection and her generosity always made me think that she was made to be a ‘mother.’ ... I never cease to thank God for such a ‘gift’ to the Congregation.”

“She did so much for our religious family, and for me in particular, saving me more than once in times of difficulty, always with understanding and a lovely smile, saying, ‘Go ahead now!’”

Others witnessed to Mother Celine’s great love for the elderly. “She loved the poor and knew how to make sure that they were not humiliated.” Although she had only limited contact with the Resi-



In 1998 a group of lay people involved in our Homes and a delegation of Little Sisters met with Mother General Celine to envision a new lay association, the Association Jeanne Jugan. Today over 1,400 Jeanne Jugan Associates share in our charism and mission in our Homes around the world.

dents during her long years at the motherhouse, she made the most of the opportunities that her visits to the Homes afforded her. In the last few years she exercised her vow of hospitality in a special way by befriending an elderly woman who came to La Tour for Mass every Sunday. “This little lady regularly offered her a plant or a bouquet of flowers. Now, she often says to me: ‘Without Mother Celine, I feel like an orphan,’” wrote Mother General María.

It’s not an exaggeration to say that we all feel a bit like orphans without Mother Celine. But we take comfort in the words of Mother General María. “Now I ask her in prayer to watch over all of us so that we may live in an ever better way Sister Mary of the Cross’ spirit of humble service, with zeal for souls and communicative joy, just as Mother Celine did to the very end. May she now intercede for many good vocations, since she always kept this intention uppermost in her mind. Let us entrust to Mary, our Mother, our model, our joy and our protection, the present and the future of our dear Congregation. ‘God will help us; the work is his.’” ©



Death defying, life affirming

Facing the challenges in our vocation with joy and confidence in Providence

For the last fifty years thousands of pro-life Americans have been gathering in Washington, D.C. each January to march in favor of an end to legalized abortion in our country. Recently this effort has expanded to include a number of states as well. These pro-life marches are joyful, youthful and deeply energizing, a source of hope for the pro-life movement and the Church.

Among important issues involving the dignity of human life that concern the Church, abortion plays a central role because it is always gravely immoral (*The Gospel of Life*, no. 57). Despite the overturning of *Roe v Wade* in 2022, abortion remains a volatile and complex issue in our society. But it is not the only “pro-life” issue that deserves our attention.

The Church strives to promote a consistent ethic of life. “A wide spectrum of issues touches on the protection of human life and the promotion of human dignity. As Pope John Paul II has reminded us: ‘Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent.... Human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good’ (*The Gospel of Life*, no. 87)” (USCCB, *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*).

As Little Sisters we are deeply concerned about the “other end” of the pro-life spectrum — the care of the sick, the elderly and the dying. Just as she has well-articulated teachings regarding the beginning of life, the Church has clear guidelines proscribing euthanasia and assisted suicide. But it is not enough to show concern for those at



Four generations gather in Pawtucket!

the very threshold of death — we must care for the elderly, sick and disabled long before they reach the point of death.

Our recent popes have shared with us their concern for older persons and a wealth of pastoral wisdom concerning them.

A society is judged by how it treats its elders

Pope John Paul II articulated a clear ideal in his landmark encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae* (n. 94): “Neglect of the elderly or their outright rejection are intolerable. Their presence in the family, or at least their closeness to the family in cases where limited living space or other reasons make this impossible, is of fundamental importance in creating a climate of mutual interaction and enriching communication between the different age-groups. It is therefore important to preserve, or to re-establish where it has been lost, a sort of ‘covenant’ between generations. In this way parents, in their later years, can receive from their children the acceptance and solidarity which they themselves gave to their children when they brought them into the world. This is required by obedience to the divine commandment to honor one’s father and mother (cf. Ex 20:12; Lev 19:3). But there is more. The elder-



In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, two of our Little Sisters recently spent a morning with young adults from Christ in the City, whose mission is to form young people to think with the Church while engaging them in outreach to the homeless where they are, simply to love them in the midst of their poverty.

ly are not only to be considered the object of our concern, closeness and service. They themselves have a valuable contribution to make to the Gospel of life. Thanks to the rich treasury of experiences they have acquired through the years, the elderly can and must be sources of wisdom and witnesses of hope and love.”

Our current society is very far from Pope John Paul II’s vision, a realization he attributed to materialism, excessive individualism and a loss of the sense of God. “Interpersonal relations are seriously impoverished.... The criterion of personal dignity — which demands respect, generosity and service — is replaced by the criterion of efficiency, functionality and usefulness: others are considered not for what they ‘are,’ but for what they ‘have, do and produce.’ This is the supremacy of the strong over the weak” (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 23).

Pope Francis often speaks of the “throwaway culture” to describe the neglect and abandonment of those considered useless, particularly the very young and the very old. Francis’ concept of the throwaway culture aligns with what John Paul II termed the culture of death, which he saw “advancing above all in prosperous societies, marked by an attitude of excessive preoccupation with efficiency ... which sees

the growing number of elderly and disabled people as intolerable and too burdensome. These people are very often isolated by their families and by society, which are organized almost exclusively on the basis of criteria of productive efficiency, according to which a hopelessly impaired life no longer has any value” (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 64).

Hard times for vocations

These observations of John Paul II, made in 1995, have proven true, as evidenced by the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia in many countries around the world and the growing crisis in eldercare caused by underfunding and severe workforce shortages.

I am convinced that the paucity of religious vocations, including vocations to our own Congregation, is also related to this coarsening of human relations, as well as the culture of materialism and exaggerated individualism.

A decrease in the number of young women joining our community may also be related to the fact that many young people today grow up far from their elders, without roots, as Pope Francis often says. From Little Sisters who share their vocation stories it is evident that a close and loving relationship with grandparents or other family elders is often the spark that lights the flame of a vocation at the service of the elderly. This is true from the eldest to the youngest Little Sisters.

Over the last decade we have been forced to reduce the number of our Homes in nearly every region of the world due to the aging of our communities and a diminution in the number of new vocations. It is deeply painful to realize that our ability to care for the elderly is thus seriously reduced at the very moment when the needs of a rapidly growing population of older persons have never been greater!

Crisis in elder care

For several years now we have also been grappling with the same workforce issues faced by other providers of senior care. A recent report from *Leading Age*, a community of nonprofit aging services

and providers in the United States, noted that by 2034 there will be more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18. By 2030 3.5 million workers will be needed in long-term care services to keep pace with the needs of our aging population.

Already today over 800,000 needy older adults and people with disabilities in the United States are languishing on Medicaid-funded state waiting lists without caregivers to provide the home care services they need. In the aftermath of the pandemic the situation in long-term care facilities is no better. Ninety-nine percent of U.S. nursing homes and 96% of assisted living communities are dealing with staffing shortages.

Over 300 U.S. nursing homes closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, displacing 13,000 vulnerable seniors. Today two-thirds of the remaining nursing homes in the U.S. are at risk of closing. Without a dramatic reversal in these trends, thousands of older adults and their families will lose access to quality care. This situation is creating fertile ground for the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia, and the covert commission of these acts where they are still illegal.

I share these frightening statistics not to be a prophet of doom, but to issue a call to prayer and action!

Affirm life, defy death!

Our foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, trusted completely in Divine Providence to sustain her work at the service of the elderly, often saying, “If God is with us it will be accomplished.” I believe that she subscribed to the advice of St. Ignatius of Loyola: “Pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on you.”

If Jeanne Jugan were here today she would do just that — she would pray hard for vocations, for the needs of the elderly and for the lay collaborators we so desperately need to assure their care — confident that God was already sending them!

Jeanne Jugan would also take action — inviting people from various walks of life to get involved in our Homes, and advocating for the well-being of the elderly.

What about us? There are many things we can do today to nurture a covenant between generations and a more caring culture where the lives of the elderly will be esteemed and respected. Depending on your life situation here are a few suggestions:

PRAY that young people with generous, compassionate hearts will be drawn to careers in geriatrics/gerontology ... and even better, to life-long vocations at the service of the elderly ... perhaps as Little Sisters of the Poor!

If you are a young person, **OPEN YOUR HEART** to the seniors in your life, and to the possibility that God is calling you to a career or a vocation at their service. Don't be afraid to give us a call! Our life shared with the elderly, lived in the spirit of the Beatitudes, is not easy, but it is a beautiful, joy-filled life!

CREATE opportunities for intergenerational encounters; if you know a young person in whom you see the qualities of a good caregiver, tell them so and **ENCOURAGE** them to explore a caring profession, or ... a priestly or religious vocation!

AFFIRM LIFE by helping the seniors you know to embrace this season of life by pursuing what is most meaningful to them. Spend time with the elders in your family; volunteer in a home for the elderly. Show esteem and support to those who work in caring professions and thank them for their service.

DEFY DEATH by advocating and voting against assisted suicide and euthanasia and by helping others to understand the inherent evil of these acts. Support initiatives and policies in favor of increased compensation, benefits and incentives for aging services professionals, especially front-line caregivers; support reform of restrictive long-term care regulations and inadequate financing.

Life is always beautiful, even in old age

While visiting a home for the elderly in 2012, Pope Benedict XVI asserted, "The quality of a society, I mean of a civilization, is ... judged by how it treats elderly people and by the place it gives them in community life. Those who make room for the elderly make room for



life! Those who welcome the elderly welcome life!”

To the elderly themselves on that occasion he confided, “At times our gaze is veiled by sadness, seeing this phase of life as the time of sunset.... Although I am aware of the difficulties that our age entails I would like to tell you with deep conviction: it is beautiful to be old!” And it is beautiful to share our lives with older persons, as our vocation invites us to do!

Pope Benedict continued, “At every phase of life it is necessary to be able to discover the presence and

blessing of the Lord and the riches they bring. We must never let ourselves be imprisoned by sorrow! We have received the gift of longevity. Living is beautiful even at our age ... In our faces may there always be the joy of feeling loved by God and not sadness.”

These words of our recently deceased pope emeritus capture the positive, joy-filled spirit with which those who believe in the sacredness of human life are called to embrace aging. The ability to defy death by fully affirming every stage and condition of life is really what being pro-life is all about!

Two years ago Pope Francis instituted a day honoring grandparents and the elderly, to be celebrated each year on the fourth Sunday of July. It is my dream that this day will evolve to the point where the streets of our major cities are filled with families and people of all ages joyfully celebrating the covenant between generations. ☺

– Sr. Constance Carolyn



Thank you, Mimi!

by Caroline Marcus

A beloved member of our worldwide Little Sisters family, Colette Laffly was the sister of Sr. Joseph de Ste. Elisabeth, a longtime member of our motherhouse community. She was also a devoted volunteer at Jeanne Jugan Residence in Washington, D.C., even into her nineties. We were touched by her granddaughter Caroline's eulogy at Colette's funeral. The memories and sentiments Caroline conveys beautifully express the covenant between generations so desired by the Church.

Before I begin, I want to take the opportunity on behalf of the Laffly, Murphy, and Marcus family to thank all of you for being here today to help us celebrate my grandmother's 97 ½ years of life. Seeing how many people are here today is a true testament to how many lives Mimi touched. She wouldn't believe how many familiar faces joined us to celebrate her amazing life but I can understand why there are so many people here.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Caroline Marcus, Mimi's youngest grandchild. A little bit about me: I grew up here in Bethesda, just a mile away from my grandmother, however, for the past few years, I have lived many hours away from home. Several months ago I planned to come back to Bethesda for a few weeks to spend time with the family, not realizing that this would overlap with Mimi's last three weeks of life. Being able to see her every day for three weeks meant that I had the opportunity to hear her life stories one more time, listen to her sing, hear her final pieces of advice, tell her what she meant to me, hear from her what she hopes the future has in store for me, and share many tearful I love you's. I have the unique honor and

opportunity to stand here before you today, to share the life lessons that I've learned from Mimi over the past twenty-five years and my very special final three weeks by her side.

Mimi shared with me the importance of family.

My grandmother, Colette Laffly, was born and raised on a farm in rural France on March 22, 1925 to Marie and Joseph Ledentu, making her the third of their ten children. Her family did not have much but they made the most of what they did have. She milked the cows and went to church all before going to school every morning, fought with her siblings over food during meals, walked ten miles to work in her teenage years, and was grateful to receive an orange for Christmas. Mimi never complained, she just worked hard and supported her family at all times.

Mimi endured difficult times during her childhood living through World War II. The Nazis occupied their town and lived in their home. One would think of this time period as the most trying times to grow up, however she remembered it as the best time of her life. She taught us that what you have doesn't matter. What matters is who you're with and what you make of your time.

The war ended and Mimi would eventually find her way to hotel school. In her work, she'd eventually meet a strapping young lad, Roger, or Papy, my late grandfather. Mimi and Papy were both ambitious and dreamt of a better life. They left on a whim for the US and arrived with no money and no understanding of English. Mimi immediately felt homesick and questioned her decision to leave her family, but she found her footing with an admirable amount of hard work and determination. They worked in restaurant kitchens to make a new life for their would-be family. They had two girls together: my aunt Geneveive and my mother Monique, and raised their girls on Warren Street in Washington DC. They were married for sixty-six years until Papy passed away in 2016. Through all of the stories she shared, it was apparent that Mimi adored her family.

Mimi shared with me the importance of love

She held many jobs but of all the jobs she held, she perhaps took her job as grandmother most seriously. Mimi loved her grandchildren unconditionally. All of us: myself, Michael, and Julie all knew how much we were cherished by her. I have many wonderful memories of time spent with Mimi through the years, such as our



summer trips to Ocean City, playing endless games with her and Papy, all of the sleepovers featuring back scratches, ice cream, and watching the TV show *Press Your Luck*, and always being offered omelets with Comté cheese, Poulain chocolate, ginger ale, or anything from her candy stash. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.

There are so many more memories I have, all of which include an act of love from her. In recent years, she would often check in on me over the phone. She'd end each call with "*I still love you,*" just to make sure I know I'm loved. I felt immense love from Mimi and that's something I will always carry with me.

Mimi shared with me the importance of selflessness

Whether it be helping out on the farm when she was young, making a life for her family in America, or saving for her family's future. I especially saw it in the way she never wasted anything.

She seldom left food on her plate and always told us how fortunate we are to always have full bellies. She always reused anything she could whether it be napkins, plastic bags, or wrapping paper. And of course, we all know that no leftover dinner roll was safe from Mimi's purse at the end of a meal. All of this was so she could save for her children and grandchildren, never spending a penny on herself and still being so grateful for everything she had.

Mimi shared with me the importance of faith

Mimi grew up in a Catholic household and in her 97 years never lost sight of her Catholic roots. Mimi embodied what being a good Catholic meant. When she first arrived in America the first two things she did was seek out a French parish and a Little Sisters of the Poor home. She made sure to go to Mass every Sunday and holy days of obligation ... and also made sure everyone else did too. She took time to pray every day. She gave up much of her time doing service. Her favorite was serving in the cafe at the Little Sisters of the Poor where she "served the elderly" where the "elderly" she "served" may not have known that Mimi was ten years their senior.

Mimi shared with me the importance of friendship

Until Mimi's last day, she never stopped making friends. She held that special talent of conversing easily with strangers. Everyone who encountered her immediately felt like one of her best friends. She knew everyone that lived in her building and would wave to everyone that walked outside as she peered out of her window. She was not



afraid to join communities such as the French community or a widow's group once Papy passed away. When you were engaged in a conversation with Mimi she would hold onto your arm and really listen to what you had to say because to her, what you had to say was the

most important thing in that moment. One of the residents in her building said, "She was the heart of our community" and I think many of us can relate to this.

I'll always remember Mimi this way, but no matter our relation to her — whether it be wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, or friend — she left us all with many memories. Mimi never failed to put a smile on our faces with her "Mimi-isms" as we call them, which included: her impeccable skills to recall any date, event, or name, her ability to learn the ipod at age 90, her motivation to stay active (I can still see her doing squats by the pool in Florida during our last trip in January), her determination to find golf balls when visiting Florida, And passing away specifically on a Sunday as a reminder to always go to church on Sundays.

Before I close, I want to thank you again for being here today to support my family and to honor Mimi. I also want to thank Kathy

and Angie, her nurses who took care of her and were by her side since July. They were our angels the past few months. I especially want to thank my mom and my aunt who were both by Mimi's side every day doing everything they could to make her final months, weeks, and days as peaceful and painless as possible. Thank you for the strength and perseverance you showed when caring for Mimi. In the times I needed comfort you both were the first ones to be there for me, just like Mimi. I know Mimi was extremely proud of both of you and so grateful to have the most amazing daughters.

Lastly, I want to thank Mimi. Thank you for all of the wisdom you shared with us through your words and actions. Over the last twenty-five years and especially the last three weeks you left me with endless stories and memories. I now realize that the gift of the last three weeks did not end when you passed. It lives in me forever and I can confidently continue on, knowing that you and your memories will be with me always. I can experience the world knowing everything you taught me. I am who I am today because of you and will strive to live my life to the absolute fullest each day, exactly like you did. I still love you, Mimi-pette, and always will (September 23, 2022). ©

Mary, solicitous Mother in the Visitation, teach us how to listen to the Word, a listening that makes us jump up quickly and leads us toward the situations of poverty where the presence of your Son is needed.

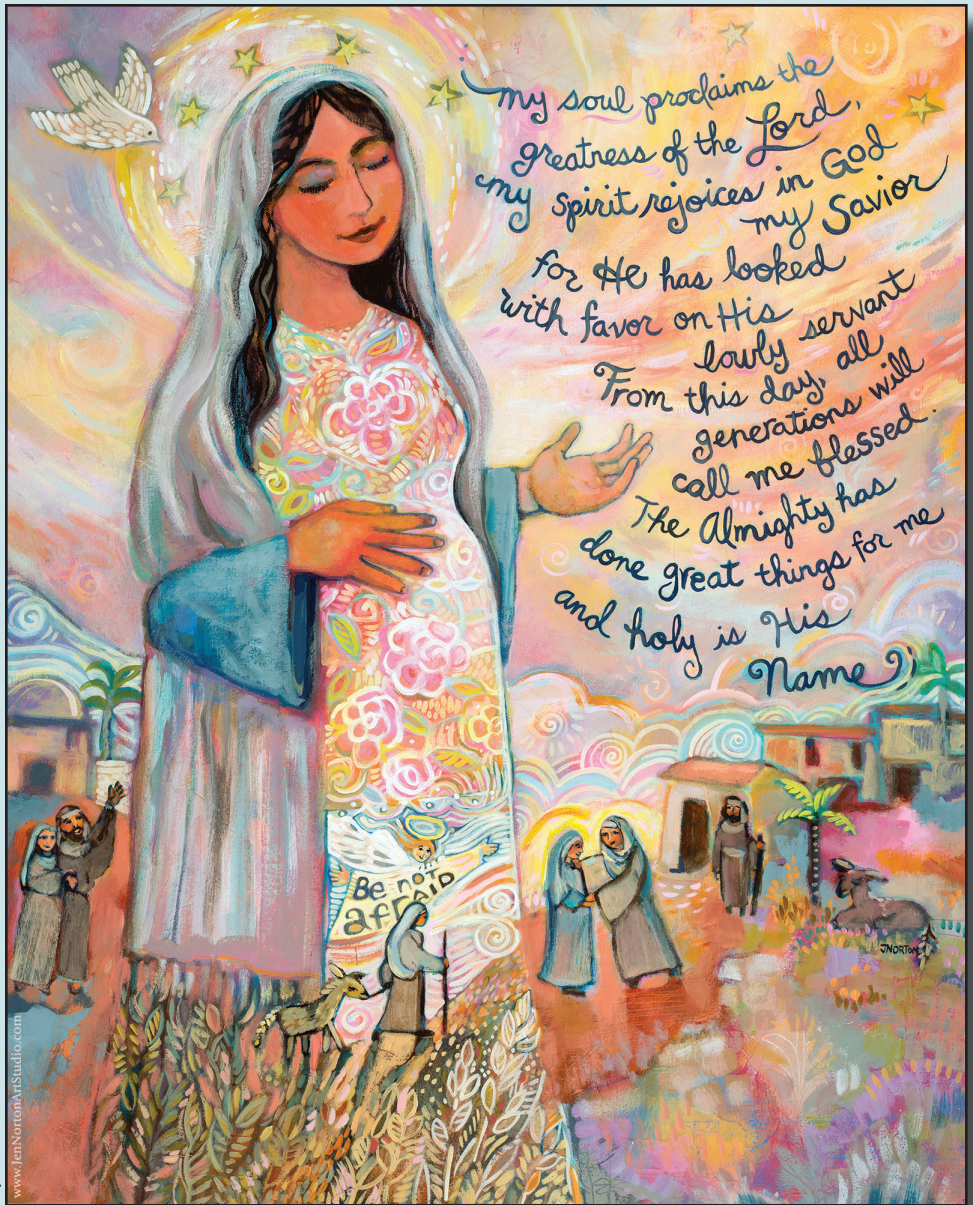
Teach us to bear Jesus, silently and humbly as you did! May our community (families) be in the midst of those who do not know him to spread his Gospel, testifying to it not in words but with our lives; not proclaiming it but living it!

Teach us to travel simply as you did, with our eyes always fixed on Jesus present in your womb – contemplating him, adoring him, and imitating him.

Mary, Woman of the Magnificat, teach us to be faithful to our mission: to bring Jesus to people!

Oh, beloved Mother, this is your own mission, which Jesus first entrusted to you and which you have willed to share with us.

Help us and intercede for us so that we might do what you did in the house of Zechariah: to glorify God and sanctify people in Jesus, thanks to Him and for Him! Amen! – Saint Charles de Foucauld



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Mary thought more of others than of herself.
And this gave enthusiasm and direction to her life.

Each of you can ask:

“How do I react to the needs that I see all around me? ...
Do I show interest and willingness to help?”

– Pope Francis



Serenity

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