

THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR



“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”
Matthew 25:40

It is the Christmas season – a time for family, friends and gift giving. At first glance one might not consider a trip to the Little Sisters of the Poor nursing home in Gallup during the holidays. But I would suggest otherwise. In our world of “It’s all about me,” bling-bling and *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*, be countercultural this Christmas and experience genuine charity and love.

My first contact with the Little Sisters of the Poor occurred in 1983 when our law firm was asked to assist them in obtaining permission to build a new nursing home in Gallup to serve the elderly poor in our area. At the time the sisters were considering building in the mission areas of the Southwest, Alaska or Hawaii. They chose Gallup because of the large number of elderly Native Americans.

I still remember the Gallup City Council meeting in 1987 to approve the building of the nursing home. The project was a 7-million-dollar investment in Gallup, but it was not universally supported. I

stood there with the sisters (who by the way were little in stature) before the Mayor and Council. That day the Mother Provincial of the order from Chicago had flown in to witness the workings of the Gallup City Council. She told me, “Don’t introduce me. I just want to watch, but we are committed to this project.” The neighbors came and voiced their support and objections. One person complained that traffic in the area would increase and destroy the quiet neighborhood. A volunteer who worked at other facilities around the country replied that they wished that they had a traffic problem but unfortunately many people did not come to visit their relatives and friends. In the end the Council voted 4-1 to approve the project. And now they have been with us for 30 years.

The Little Sisters were founded by Jeanne Jugan (recently proclaimed a saint by Pope Benedict) in 1839. The French laywoman began her ministry by taking poor elderly persons into her home. She formed an order of sisters who now serve the elderly all over



By Jay Mason

After 36 years in Gallup and inspired by the tireless efforts of Nate and Chuck to have a positive effect on Gallup and the surrounding area, Jay Mason has written some vignettes about his life in Gallup and beyond.

photos by Kitty Mason



the world. The sisters take the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and the additional vow of hospitality. They support their homes by begging for food and other donations wherever they are. I remember being at church one Sunday when one of the sisters talked about the work of the Little Sisters and asked for donations to support their work. It was so convincing that I emptied my wallet into the collection basket. What a blessing to have them in Gallup.

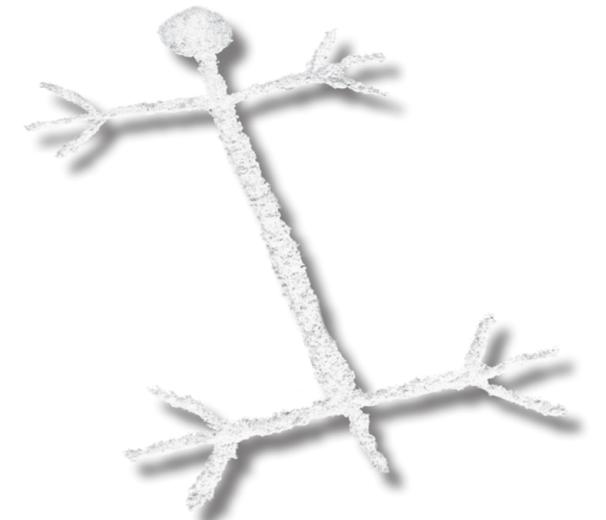
The truly amazing thing about the nursing home, called Villa Guadalupe, is the experience of visiting the home itself. You are a visitor in the home where the sisters and their residents live. The stereotypical sights and smells of a nursing home are just not there. I hope to live there myself someday. It is a beautiful experience to watch the sisters, staff and volunteers care for the elderly on a daily basis. I asked a sister once how she could devote her life to care for the elderly. Most of us experience that once or twice during our lifetimes. Sister replied, “Jay, we serve the elderly not for the good we give to them, but for the good they give to us.”

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Our family volunteered at the Little Sisters when the children were young. The elderly love to see families and especially children. I know they gave more to us than we gave to them. Another remarkable fact about the Little Sisters nursing home is the number of residents who live past 100 years of age. It is no accident. The care and compassion shown them increases their time on this earth.

If you looking for something good and rewarding to do during the holidays, visit the Little Sisters. Call the Little Sisters (863-6894) and ask about a good time to visit. Go at mealtime and help the residents get to their table in the dining room. Bring your children and friends and sing carols for the residents. Go to a Christmas program that will bring tears to your eyes when you see the joy on the faces of the residents. What a precious gem we have in Gallup at the Little Sisters of the Poor. As we celebrate the birth of Christ and God’s gift of His Son to our mixed-up world, let us thank God for the Little Sisters.

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