

First Nun Run draws 4X expected crowd for Little Sisters of the Poor

Rain fell steadily on Baltimore City for most of Saturday, but mercifully held off until after the Nun Run, the Little Sisters of the Poor's inaugural 5K race - a fundraiser they said was more of a "friend-raiser."

Under overcast skies, more than 800 people gathered in the early morning under the spires of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen for the 3.1-mile loop or a one-mile walk. That was 550 more than the sisters expected - they were told a first-time race typically draws a slim crowd. The racers represented 71 parishes and 24 schools.

"It's amazing how many people have supported the sisters from all over," said Marcy Shea-Frank, the Little Sisters of the Poor's development director. She said she hopes the race helped people become more familiar with the Little Sisters' work.

People may not know St. Martin's, the Catonsville home for the elderly poor where the sisters live and work, but they likely know their name. There's probably no other religious order in America who've been in the national news as often as they have. The Little Sisters of the Poor are among more than 100 businesses and organizations suing the federal government over its HHS mandate to provide insurance coverage for contraceptives, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs, and have been among the most visible plaintiffs.

Shea-Frank said she didn't know whether the sisters' lawsuit affected race turnout, but said it may have.

On race day, she did not yet know how much the race raised, she said. "Right now I'm just hoping for a couple thousand, really," she said.

Before we runners gathered behind the start line, a trainer from Brick Bodies led us in warm-up aerobics and stretches. A few of the Little Sisters did the moves with the rest of us, their white habits contrasting our gray running tees and shorts. The mood was festive as Archbishop William Lori stood on the steps to welcome and bless the

runners.

"No matter who wins, the real victors are the Little Sisters of the Poor," he said, calling them "champions" in living the consecrated life, caring for elderly and defending religious freedom.

At precisely 8 a.m., we were off. At my side was my friend Meg, my regular race partner. Our last race, however, was before I was pregnant with my now 11-month-old son. Needless to say, this run was more social than competitive (confirmed by my finishing time, which reflected a "typical morning jog" pace). We chatted the entire 3.1-mile loop south on Charles, west on Wyndhurst, north on Roland and east on Northern.

I'm sure that some runners were solely focused on the finishing time, but it seemed most were like me - just happy to be supporting the Little Sisters. St. Martin's includes independent apartments for low-income seniors, assisted living and skilled nursing care. They strive to make St. Martin's not feel like a nursing facility, but a family home.

The sisters do their work without the benefit of an endowment, meaning that they "beg" for their funds, Shea-Frank said. They didn't have to beg me very hard to get my \$35 for the race, but I smiled at the idea of a lifestyle that still reflects the spirit of medieval mendicant orders, whose entire day-to-day survival depended on others' benevolence.

"We hope that this really grows," Shea-Frank said of the Nun Run. "We hope that this introduces more people to us, and that next year's run is all that much bigger."

The sisters have been praying for the runners, said Sister Lawrence Mary Pocock as she handed out "Run for the Nuns" shoelaces to kids and teens running the race. She saw the crowd as a sign of the "tremendous support" they receive from laypeople, priests and Archbishop Lori.

"We've very excited and very touched by the sign of support," she said. "It's a friend-raiser as much as a fundraiser. It is our hope that everybody who comes today becomes our friends and continues to support our work, because we need all the

help we can get in caring for our elderly residents.”

According to the sisters’ website, caring for and accompanying the dying is the “summit” of their ministry. “At St. Martin’s it is our goal that no one die alone,” they state. They added that their staff, volunteers and benefactors “are the extended hands and hearts of the Little Sisters.”

Scott David, 48, said he was running because the commitment he and his wife, Kim, have to the sisters and St. Martins. Kim David sits on its board of directors.

“I’m so thrilled with the turnout,” he said.

Karrie Bangs and her children Hannah, 13, and Chad, 10, joined fellow parishioners of Church of the Ascension in Halethorpe for the run after two Little Sisters spoke about their work at their parish.

“They have a good cause,” she said. “They do such beautiful work.”

Charm City Run organized the event. [Race results are here.](#)

