

Little Sisters of the Poor ‘thrilled’ their founder will be canonized

WASHINGTON – The announcement that Pope Benedict XVI will canonize Blessed Jeanne Jugan, the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, on Oct. 11 has created excitement among members of the congregation worldwide.

“We knew it was only a matter of time, but everyone was just thrilled when the official announcement was made,” said Sister Constance Veit, publications coordinator in the Little Sisters of the Poor’s Baltimore province. “We’ve anticipated this for so long.”

Pope John Paul II beatified Jeanne Jugan in 1982, and Pope Benedict XVI signed a document Dec. 6, 2008, recognizing the miracle advancing her sainthood cause.

Pope Benedict Feb. 21 presided over a consistory that gave final approval for the canonization of 10 people, including Blessed Jeanne, who began her ministry on the streets of France taking the elderly and poor into her home in the early decades of the 1800s.

To support her ministry, Blessed Jeanne begged for money, a tradition the Little Sisters of the Poor consider a fundamental part of their mission today.

The canonization will take place during the Synod of Bishops for Africa, and is expected to be celebrated in St. Peter’s Square, along with four others who will be declared saints.

The miracle linked to Blessed Jeanne concerns Dr. Edward Gatz, a retired Omaha, Neb., anesthesiologist diagnosed with terminal cancer in 1989, Sister Constance told Catholic News Service Feb. 23.

The doctor was advised by a Jesuit priest at Creighton University in Omaha to pray to Blessed Jeanne and a few months later a follow-up biopsy found Mr. Gatz – who is still alive at the age of 71 – to be cancer-free, she said.

Sister Loraine Marie Maguire, provincial superior of the Little Sisters' Baltimore province, said the timing of Blessed Jeanne's canonization coincides with a milestone in her own ministry.

"For me personally, it has a special meaning because I entered the Little Sisters of the Poor in 1982, the year Jeanne Jugan was beatified in Rome," Sister Loraine said. "Now, in the year of her canonization, I am celebrating my silver jubilee - 25 years of religious profession. How amazing God is."

Since Blessed Jeanne began her mission in 1839, the Little Sisters of the Poor congregation has grown to more than 2,700 members, who care for approximately 13,000 needy elderly people in 202 family-style homes throughout the world, including 32 in North America.

Rose Dente, 96, one of the oldest residents of St. Martin's Home - an assisted-living facility run by the Little Sisters in Baltimore - was ecstatic when she was told the canonization was set for Oct. 11.

"In my heart, I always knew Jeanne Jugan was a saint," Ms. Dente said. "Now, the whole world will know it."

Celebrations will be planned at Little Sisters facilities worldwide, and members of the congregation are waiting to see who will be eligible to travel to Rome in October for the canonization, Sister Constance told CNS.

"With the population of older persons growing at an exponential rate, Jeanne's work and her message are even more relevant today than they were when Pope John Paul II beatified her over a quarter-century ago," she said. "As a patroness of the elderly, Jeanne Jugan is truly a saint of our time."