

First generation Catholic Worker dies in Minnesota

Joe Winter | Jun. 21, 2010

MINNEAPOLIS -- Jane Judge, Minnesota nurse who worked personally with Dorothy Day, died last month at age 97.

Judge worked with Day in New York and Alabama, then followed in Day's footsteps and along with seven other women operated a Catholic Worker house in Minneapolis.

Later, the group, of which Judge was the last surviving member before her death, moved to Little Canada, Minn., and for decades ran Maryhouse. It served as their residence and a home for single mothers trying to get back on their feet. Day on occasion visited Maryhouse to take a break and work on her writing.

Judge in 1944 attended a retreat with her sister Marian at a church in a poor African-American neighborhood in Minneapolis. The experience moved them, and they along with six other women quit their jobs, pooled their assets and purchased a rundown building to live in the same way as the people they served.

The group took turns -- two at a time -- to work a year with Day in New York. Then, after seven years at the house in Minneapolis, the women saw a need to expand, and grow vegetables and animals to help feed the poor, so they moved operations to more rural Little Canada. They eventually reentered the workforce to provide income for running Maryhouse, which retains their vision, according to volunteers serving there from nearby St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church.

Its longtime faith formation director, Jean Conant, who worked with Judge, said that Judge at first wanted to replicate in Minneapolis what Day had done in New York, then realized that the cultural differences required alterations. "She had an infectious smile and always was positive and hopeful," Conant said. "She was quite radical for her time, in a good way, and I don't think that a lot of the parishioners realized that side of her."

Judge until the end continued to use her meager earnings to provide for several small children in Africa.

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