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New Global Sisters Report feature

Lisa Gutierrez | Mar. 14, 2014 NCR Today
Sisters making mainstream headlines

First, a welcome!

In this spot every week Global Sisters Report will look at stories that the secular, mainstream media ? newspapers, magazines, TV, Internet blogs, etc. ? are doing about Catholic sisters.

We will cast a wide net, reporting on the good, the bad and the ?ugh, what were they thinking?? stories out there.

See a story we should know about? Let us know at the e-mail address at the bottom of this column.

And here we go.

Spain banks on nuns

The [1] Wall Street Journal [1] discovered that Spain?s financial problems have created a big headache for a convent that does work for one of the country?s largest banks.

After morning Mass, Sr. Mariuca Mesones and 10 other cloistered members of the Order of St. Clare go to a back office of the Convent of San Juan of Penitencia where they do work for Banco Popular, the *Journal* reports.

They do things like enter data into the bank's computer network and store documents. ?They call us the techie nuns because we work a lot with computers," Sr. Mariuca told the newspaper.

The bank has relied on the sisters there and at about 20 other Spanish communities for routine administrative tasks since the 1970s. But in these bad times, there?s less work for the nuns, who are tightening their belts ? turning down the heat in the 400-year-old convent, for instance ? to make up for the loss of income.

?We need to work to survive,? said Sr. Mariuca. ?We can't live from nothing.?

Her field of dreams

She grew up Jewish in Indiana, across the street from a Catholic church, and as a young woman found her life?s calling in a Passionist community in 1982.

After the Berlin Wall fell in the late ?80s she went to Eastern Europe to help rebuild its spiritual community and helped other women find new lives as sisters.

Now Mother Bernadetta, a member of the Order of Preachers of the Cross, is hard at work setting up a priory in southwest Virginia, reports the *The News Leader [2]* in Staunton, Va.

She moved to Abingdon in the summer of 2013, joining Christ the King Catholic Church. Wearing her habit,

she?s recognized by people all over the small town.

She told the newspaper that she?s gotten a lot of support for her effort, especially from Protestants in town who come to her for prayer.

?It?s like that movie,? she said, referring to Kevin Costner?s 1989 baseball movie ?Field of Dreams.?

?You build it and they will come. That?s how I feel.?

Must-see TV

A Scottish physician made a life-saving diagnosis for a sister in Scotland after seeing her on TV.

Scottish newspapers report that endocrinologist John Bevan of the Aberdeen Royal Infirmary saw 70-year-old Sr. Aelred on BBC1?s ?The One Show? talking about her life as a nun.

He noticed something odd about how the Poor Clare nun from the Arundel Convent in West Sussex was speaking.

?I was watching because Whoopi Goldberg was on speaking to these nuns trying to plug the ?Sister Act? stage show,? he told the *The* *[3]Herald* *[3]* in Edinburgh.

?When the video greeting came on, I said to my wife, ?The middle nun is speaking as though her tongue is too large for her mouth.??

His diagnosis, through the TV mind you, proved to be correct: The sister was suffering from acromegaly, a rare condition in which the body produces too much growth hormone and has the potential to shorten a life by up to 10 years.

After the show Bevan tracked down the producer who contacted Sr. Aelred. She subsequently had surgery to remove a benign tumor on her pituitary gland that was causing the condition. She recently met with Bevan and his wife at the convent to thank him.

?When I met him, I told him I would be forever in his debt for taking the time to diagnose me by watching me on television,? she told the newspaper.

She did what?

What kind of person steals from nuns?

Who kind of person steals $285,000 from nuns?

Linda Rose Gagnon did ? then blew through all that money in just 64 days. Earlier this month she was sentenced to three years in federal prison for it.

The Log Angeles Times *[4]* reports that the 59-year-old woman from Irvine, Calif. was found guilty in November of defrauding the U.S. Province of the Religious of Jesus & Mary, an order devoted to educational and charitable work.

She promised to help the sisters buy a retirement home but went on a spending spree with their money instead. A spokesman for the U.S. attorney?s office told the Times that Gagnon spent the money on meals, travel, manicures, lingerie, pet-sitting for her dog and leases for Audi sports cars.

She has been ordered to surrender by June 13 to serve her prison sentence, handed down this month. And yes, she must repay the sisters, too.

Move over, Gucci

The [5] New York [5]Times [5] recently visited an Italian monastery that?s become a fashion destination for budget-savvy brides in these hard economic times.

For years, the cloistered Augustinian nuns at St. Rita monastery, in the central Umbrian hills, have operated a secondhand wedding dress business for young women in need.

But as Italy?s recession drags on, the monastery?s collection of donated gowns has become popular for a growing number of brides.

Running the atelier has become a full-time job for Sister Maria Laura, a former designer/seamstress who sees brides by appointment only.

Some brides make donations in gratitude, others leave nothing at all. Whatever the case, said Sr. Maria Laura, she can find the right gown for almost every bride.

?If you have a dream and we can make it come true, we?ll do our best,? she said.

?You build it and they will come. That?s how I feel.?

Don?t take our nuns away!

Catholics in Whangaroa in northern New Zealand are not happy that they are losing their nuns, according to *The New Zealand Herald [6]*.

One parishioner collected more than 400 petition signatures asking the Marist order to leave three nuns at the convent in their community, where nuns have served since 1928.

The order is moving the nuns to another location so that their dwindling numbers can serve a wider area, the newspaper reports.

Parishioner Jeanette Kinneally, who circulated the petition, acknowledged that the petition probably wouldn?t change things. But she wanted to show Sisters Margarita, Isabelle and Catherine how much support they had in the community.

Sister Gemma Wilson, a leader of the Marist order in New Zealand, told the newspaper she was overwhelmed by the love Whangaroa people had shown the sisters.

Sr. Baldy leaves a message

It?s not often that major daily newspapers devote space to the obituaries of people other than the famous and infamous. Sr. Carol Juhasz was neither, but she *was* memorable.

When she died on Feb. 26 after a year-long battle with inflammatory breast cancer, the *The Detroit News* *[2]* wrote a story about the irrepressible Sr. Juhasz.

The 62-year-old pastoral associate at St. Joan of Arc in St. Clair Shores, Mich., died at the Monroe mother house of her order, Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

She named the last 11 months of her life The Year of Living Vigorously and filled it with bucket-list activities ? gambling in Vegas, riding in a fire truck and shopping in New York, the newspaper reports.

More than 1,500 people attended her memorial Mass. Some recalled that during her cancer battle she nicknamed herself Sr. Baldy, one example of how she showed people that it was OK to laugh during dark times.

She even modeled her funeral clothes for friends by lying on a bed with her eyes closed, mouth wide open.

She wore a red school jersey to make a video that she left behind for St. Joan?s students. "I will see you again someday," she told her students in the video. "Just look up into the night sky. One bright star will be shining. That will be me, your favorite Sr. Carol, looking down upon you, praying for you and holding you close to my heart.?

[Lisa Gutierrez is a new blogger who will be posting weekly for Global Sisters Report. That website is under development, so for now, her work will appear here on ncronline.org. She can be reached at lisa11gutierrez@gmail.com.]

Editor's Note: The *National Catholic Reporter* is embarking on a groundbreaking project to give greater voice to sisters around the world. To learn more about this project or sign up for email alerts visit, http://ncronline.org/sisters [7].

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