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Sisters making mainstream headlines

by Lisa Gutierrez

NCR Today

Sisters making mainstream headlines

A couple of weeks ago it was a crooning sister in Italy. This week a sister singing a different tune grabbed the lion's share of mainstream headlines. But first, here's a new look at a mid-century masterpiece.

Matisse and his muse

When I think of artist muses, somehow sisters aren't the first people who spring to mind. But what do I know?

Apparently not much when it comes to one of my favorites, French artist Henri Matisse. A recent story by Holly Williams in London's *The Independent* discusses one of Matisse's greatest works — a chapel he designed for a sister.

The Rosary Chapel (Chapelle du Rosaire) stands on a hillside in Vence, France. Matisse called it "the achievement of an entire life's work, the outcome of tremendous, difficult, sincere work."

It took him four years, from 1947 to 1951, to create. Williams writes that Matisse designed the building and most everything in it — the stained-glass windows, the tiles on the chapel walls, candlesticks shaped like long-stemmed anemones and pews made of a brown-colored stone he chose because it reminded him of bread.

The building was a gift for a young student nurse named Monique Bourgeois who took care of him after an operation for intestinal cancer in 1941 went horribly wrong.

Matisse never fully recovered, nor did he forget Bourgeois' kindness. In 1946 she became a Dominican

nun ? Sr. Jacques-Marie ? and moved into a convent close to where Matisse was living.

When she told him that she wished the sisters could have a chapel on their pretty hillside, Matisse, who was raised Catholic, decided to repay her.

The chapel has been a place of worship since it was dedicated in 1951. Tourists and art lovers alike visit every year. When Williams visited in January she asked Sr. Marie-Pierre what it felt like to worship in the beautiful space.

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Writes Williams: ?In broken English, a thick French accent and a beaming smile as radiant as the buttercup-yellow light filling the room, she says: ?We worship in beauty, instead of in bad things. It feels special. And I think it is better to pray in beauty.??

Raising Cain in North Carolina

Nearly 1,000 people showed up to Charlotte High School in North Carolina on Wednesday to talk about comments a sister made to students last month that many considered anti-gay and inflammatory about divorce and single parenthood.

Parents who had signed petitions and sent the diocese angry emails about the speech got an apology.

The petition read, in part: ?We resent the fact that a school-wide assembly became a stage to blast the issue of homosexuality after Pope Francis said in an interview this past fall that ?we cannot insist only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptive methods.? We are angry that someone decided they knew better than our Holy Father and invited (this) speaker.?

Sr. Jane Dominic Laurel, a Dominican sister based in Nashville, Tenn., made headlines after she spoke at a mandatory March 21 student assembly. She reportedly quoted studies that said gays and lesbians are not born with same-sex attractions and that children in single-parent homes have a greater chance of becoming homosexual.

The Charlotte Observer reported that emotions ran high at Wednesday night's meeting for parents, closed to the media. Though some defended sister for presenting traditional Catholic teachings, most in attendance reportedly protested her comments.

Charlotte Diocese spokesman David Hains told the newspaper later that the school's chaplain, the Rev. Matthew Kauth, apologized for the speech and said it was not the one he expected sister to give. She has not spoken publicly about the incident.

Hains also suggested that the school will better scrutinize speakers and alert parents when speeches will deal with sensitive subjects such as sexuality. ?Parents should have been better informed,? he said.

The newspaper also reported that sister's order has cancelled her scheduled speech in May at a diocesan youth conference in Asheville.

?They felt like this just wasn't a good time for the sister to speak again in the diocese,? Hains told the *Observer*.

This week's must-read

Scott Craven recently wrote a powerful portrait of Sr. Adele O'Sullivan in *The Arizona Republic*.

The 63-year-old member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet is a physician who ministers to Phoenix's homeless at the Circle the City respite center she helped found.

She is a rarity among women religious. Of more than 51,000 sisters serving in the United States last year, only a tiny fraction were medical doctors, Craven found.

Before Circle the City opened in October 2012, homeless people who had been discharged from local hospitals had few options. Many would return to the city's downtown homeless shelter, still wearing their medical wristbands, where they wouldn't get much more than a few hours of sleep.

Dr. O'Sullivan was director of the shelter's medical clinic from 1996 to 2008 and saw what was needed: A safety net for homeless patients who required post-hospitalization care.

They didn't have homes where they could recover, so she created one for them. Her mantra now: "Everyone deserves a time and a place to heal."

A Bronx birthday

The Servants of Mary, Ministers to the Sick have been busy the last 100 years.

The *Bronx Times* reports that the sisters who care for the chronically and terminally ill around the world moved to the United States in 1914 and still consider their Bronx, N.Y., convent their home.

The sisters are medically trained and provide all their care for free. Private donations and their annual fundraiser luncheon pay for everything from their food and clothing to maintenance on the convent itself, said Sr. Rita Miguel, their treasurer.

The sisters are also kicking off a \$250,000 fund-raising campaign this year.

They help anyone and everyone who needs them. "All we need to know is if they are sick," Sr. Miguel said.

Moving to the Dakota neighborhood

The *Jamestown Sun* noted two communities of sisters have recently moved to North Dakota.

Four cloistered Carmelite sisters moved from Alexandria, S.D., into a new monastery northeast of Hague. (They described it as "the middle of nowhere.")

They will host a three-day open house April 23 to 25 before they begin their life of prayer and fasting away from the public.

Also, four sisters from the Congregation of Teresian Carmelites in Kerala, India, have moved to south-central North Dakota where they've opened the order's first community in the Western hemisphere.

These sisters are working as missionaries and teachers among members of the Bismarck Diocese's Catholic Indian Mission on the Standing Rock reservation.

Sister saints sing on stage

The Eastman Opera Theatre in Rochester, N.Y., recently produced and performed Francis Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*.

It's the tweaked version of the true story of the Martyrs of Compiègne, 16 Carmelite sisters who died by guillotine during the French Revolution because they refused to disband their order.

The women were beatified by Pope Pius X, and their story of devotion has inspired many artists, writes Daniel J. Kushner in *The Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.

To prepare, cast members visited the Discalced Carmelites of Rochester in Pittsford, N.Y., where the cloistered sisters live prayer-filled lives, much like the martyred sisters.

"The one thing that they said that really stuck with me was, 'It's you who are on the other side of the grate, not us,'" said the opera's director Stephen Carr.

"And I just thought that was a beautiful way of expressing their feelings toward this cloistered life that they've chosen."

Sister stirs the pot

Look out, Rachael Ray. There's a new cooking-show star in town. And her name is Sr. Lucia Caram.

The Dominican nun is the star of a new Spanish cooking show called *Sister Lucy* that features traditional convent and monastery recipes, according to London's *Daily Mail*.

The long-time cook, originally from Argentina, will also show how to make yummy anise doughnuts, stews — her favorite is made of pumpkin and potato — and Argentinian pastries. Her signature dish is paella.

"I am convinced that food brings people together, makes families, makes communities and that the table is a place of talk that can help people to share what they have in their hearts, and that it can transform our world," sister told Spain's Cooking Channel, which airs the show.

In an interview with Cadena Seiz radio she said that even though she's a nun she's tempted like the rest of us by "sinful" dishes. Her downfall? Flan made with condensed milk.

Sr. Caram is made for TV. She agreed with that radio interviewer that clergy members "eat too much lemon" and have bitter "vinegar faces."

She's got a growing Twitter following of 67,000 at @sorluciacaram. And yes, I'm one of them now.

[Lisa Gutierrez posts weekly for Global Sisters Report, a new website under development; for now her work will appear here on ncronline.org.]

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>.

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