

*Reaching Out,  
Healing Together*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

The Catholic Transcript is highlighting some of the organizations and archdiocesan ministries that receive funding from the Archbishop's Annual Appeal. Below, we feature the Little Sisters of the Poor in Enfield who have been caring for the elderly at St. Joseph's Residence for nearly 50 years.

# Serving the Elderly



Sister Michael Manansala, originally from Malaysia, is pictured here with some of the third-floor residents that she cares for.

*Little Sisters of the Poor care for people in their final years until God calls them home.*

Story by **SHELLEY WOLF** | Photos by **AARON JOSEPH**

"Care of the elderly is the only thing we do, and we do it all over the world," says Mother Genevieve Nugent, who leads the congregation of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Enfield.

"Our mission is to take care of low-income elderly and surround them with love," adds Sister Frances MacKay, development director for the Little Sisters of the Poor.



Sister Frances Elisabeth MacKay is the development director.

The Little Sisters of the Poor have been caring for the elderly at St. Joseph's Residence in Enfield since 1972, and many years prior to that in New Haven. Their mission goes back to their foundress, St. Jeanne Jugan, who took in the elderly poor in revolutionary France. Today, the sisters welcome the elderly as they would Jesus himself, serving seniors with love and respect.

"We have a lifestyle of hospitality, so our

residents are here until they die," Sister Frances says. "And it's very important to the Little Sisters that when the residents are dying, we stay with them and take turns at night. We don't leave them alone."

## ■ NATURAL DEATH

At St. Joseph's Residence, nine active sisters and staff care for 85 residents, including two sisters, in a God-like and loving way. In this continuum of care facility, two floors are dedicated to assisted living and a third for skilled nursing.

Many residents, who must be at least 65 and low-income, typically arrive at St. Joseph's Residence when they are in their 80s and need help with the tasks of daily living.

"Essentially, we like to receive them when they're well enough to make the choice," Mother Genevieve says, "and then we really know them when they become frail and ill, and we know their families. We're able to give more complete care that way. Our goal is to care for them until God calls them home."

During each resident's final days, the sisters accompany them on that journey home.

"We watch the dying around the clock. We don't want them to be left alone," Mother Genevieve stresses. "Once in a while, we use hospice to help, but in general we don't need it because we know them well and it's usually a gradual process."

Accompaniment of the dying involves unceasing prayer offered by the sisters. Nursing staff provide palliative and personal care.

"We do invite families to help us. It's a very precious time,"



Mother Genevieve says. “Families sit around and they hold the hands of the person who is sick, and they remember the wonderful memories and the things that they loved. We love sharing that time with them.”

Residents and staff are invited to pray with the resident. “When a resident is dying, some places avoid that room. But here, that room becomes the center of the house,” Mother Genevieve explains. “It really is a beautiful and consoling time.”

### ■ CULTURE OF LIFE

Marge Golas, now 89, lives in assisted living at St. Joseph’s Residence. As the former recreation director, she knew she wanted to reside here in her later years. On a waiting list for three years, she was contacted about an opening around the time her husband, Joseph, fell ill. They both relocated to the residence in December 2016.

“He was on the second floor in the infirmary and I was on the third floor, but I got to see him every day. That’s what was nice. I didn’t have to drive anywhere,” Golas says. Within two months, Joseph passed away but he was never alone, accompanied in death by his wife, two adult children and the sisters.

Now Golas is doubly glad she’s living at St. Joseph’s Residence. In this nurturing environment, she’s never lonely. The Little Sisters have created a culture of life for the elderly, recognizing that all life is a precious gift from God.

“I never minded coming here to work because everyone is so happy,” Golas says. The residents are well cared for, she notes, and



Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, Little Sisters of the Poor, along with residents and friends, gather in the chapel of St. Joseph’s Residence to celebrate the golden jubilee of one of the Little Sisters.

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— Father Robert J. Rousseau, chaplain

kept busy and engaged. No one is left sitting alone in a hallway. “There’s a dignity here for the residents.”

That culture of loving care begins with the sisters, is lived out by the staff and shared by the residents. “It’s like being with a big family. We all get along and we all care for each other. We have our meals together and you really get close to everyone,” she adds.

There are many opportunities to gather together socially — for hallway bingo, treats and movies. Mass is available daily in the chapel. Earlier in the pandemic, only the sisters were permitted in. Now that the seniors have been fully vaccinated, Sister Frances says, “They’re happy they can go to the chapel.”

“We’ve never been without the sacraments, even during the pandemic,” Mother Genevieve says. Father Robert J. Rousseau, who lives nearby, serves as the chaplain. In addition to celebrating Mass, “he has a line for confession every Saturday. And we’ve had a Holy Hour during the pandemic to protect us. He helps us with the care of the dying and the family.”

Father Rousseau also visits the residents. “I enjoy being with the people. And it’s a blessing to have Mass every day,” he says. “I must admit that so many of them are an example of faith for me. Just to see them facing the reality of their older days, and facing death and facing it with such faith. They’re an encouragement to me.” ❶



Pictured here is St. Joseph Residence, located in Enfield. The small structure to the right is the chapel, where many of the residents participate in daily Mass and private prayer to our Lord, who is always present in the Holy Eucharist.