

NOTRE DAME *EVANGELIUM VITAE* MEDAL

APRIL 9, 2016

AWARDED TO SR. LORAINÉ MARIE MAGUIRE, L.S.P.,
AND THE LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR

In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope St. John Paul II distills the central commandment of the Gospel of Life to its essence: It is nothing less than “the requirement to show reverence and love for every person and the life of every person” (EV 41). This reverence and love are at the heart of the work of the Little Sisters of the Poor, whom we are pleased to honor today with the University of Notre Dame’s *Evangelium Vitae* Medal.

The work of the Little Sisters began 177 years ago with a single act of profound love: In the winter of 1839, St. Jeanne Jugan encountered an elderly woman, blind and infirm, unable to care for herself. Recognizing in her the person of Christ, St. Jeanne carried the woman to her own home, laid her in her own bed, and there continued to minister to the woman, begging among her neighbors to provide for her needs.

From that moment, St. Jeanne dedicated her life to serving the elderly poor, and soon she attracted other women inspired by her radical hospitality and love. St. Jeanne herself beautifully describes how that hospitality to the weakest and poorest members of society is a powerful witness to the Culture of Life: “By the look in his eyes or by the silence of his whole being,” St. Jeanne says, “the elderly person who is near death asks us this question: ‘Does my life still have any value? Is it worth living?’ To each person we respond with a resounding yes!”

That reverence for life is the cornerstone of the work of the Little Sisters of the Poor. As John Paul reminds us, “True compassion leads to sharing another’s pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear” (EV 66). Rather than turning from suffering—or, worse, hastening to end the life that bears it—the Little Sisters embody true compassion through their ministry to the more than 13,000 elderly people of every race and religion who live in their homes, in more than 30 countries around the world. These sisters share in both their pain and joy; tend to their daily needs, both mundane and profound; and welcome each person as a member of a beloved family, seeing in them the living image of Jesus Christ.

It was this same reverence for life that vaulted the Little Sisters into the national news in 2012, when they stood firm against a federal mandate that would require them to facilitate access via their employee healthcare plan to contraceptives that, according to the FDA’s own labeling, could cause the death of a newly conceived human being. In the face of crippling fines, the sisters have remained unbowed in their dedication to serve and defend the most vulnerable among us. Led by their Mother Provincial, Sr. Lorainé Marie Maguire, they have given the world a powerful witness to the unique, inviolable dignity of every human person, demonstrating the radical solidarity and hospitality at the core of the Gospel of Life.

And so, it is fitting that, at this great university dedicated to Our Lady, who is the Mother of Life, we should celebrate their contributions to building a Culture of Life, where every member of the human family is welcomed and embraced. We are thus honored to bestow on Sr. Loraine Marie Maguire and the Little Sisters of the Poor the University of Notre Dame *Evangelium Vitae* Medal.