

WITNESSES TO FREEDOM

LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR

"We simply cannot choose between our care for the elderly poor and our faith."



(CNS Photo/Courtesy of the Little Sisters of the Poor)

When a blind, paralyzed, elderly widow needed a place to live, Jeanne Jugan gave up her own bed so that the woman could have a comfortable place to sleep during her last years on earth.

What began as a small community of a few single women taking in poor strangers in rural France in the early 1800s became an order now known as the Little Sisters of the Poor.

The Little Sisters carry on the work of their founder, who was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009. The Little Sisters' mission is "to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself."

Continuing the tradition of St. Jeanne Jugan, the Little Sisters beg for all that they need to take care of the elderly poor, and they do not accept guaranteed forms of income.

The Little Sisters established roots in several countries, arriving in the United States in 1868. They now have 27 nursing homes across the U.S., where they take care of poor, elderly residents.

Unfortunately, a recent mandate from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would force the Little Sisters to arrange for coverage of abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives, and sterilization in their employee health plans. If the Little Sisters do not arrange for coverage of these "services," then they face massive fines from the federal government, totaling approximately \$70 million per year.

The Little Sisters were forced to sue the federal government in order to stave off these potentially crushing fines on their ministry. Their case has recently been heard before the U.S. Supreme Court, which will decide whether to vindicate the Little Sisters' rights to free exercise of religion under federal law. The Little Sisters have argued that religious freedom exists not only for houses of worship but also for those who serve others, such as in ministry to the poor, which is part and parcel of the Catholic faith.

The Little Sisters have dedicated their lives to following Christ in service to the world. We pray that the Court will uphold their freedom to serve and that our government will respect the freedom of all people of faith to contribute to the common good.

Let us pray for the Little Sisters of the Poor!



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