

Sr. Jugan's Path to Sainthood Includes Creighton Connection

By Cindy Murphy McMahon

A sacred story that began in 18th century France was brought to fulfillment in Omaha through the work of the Holy Spirit in two Creighton University alumni and the late Rev. Richard McGloin, S.J., a beloved teacher and mentor who dedicated 50 years to Creighton.

At the center of the saga is Jeanne Jugan, born in 1792 in a small French fishing port, who found her life's calling at age 47 when she opened her home to a disabled elderly woman.



She soon took in others and eventually her Christian service resulted in founding the Little Sisters of the Poor. The Catholic religious order is guided by its mission of hospitality to the

aged poor and today has a presence on five continents with more than 2,700 Little Sisters, more than 2,000 lay associates and 202 homes for more than 13,200 elderly residents.

On Oct. 3, 1982, Pope John Paul II declared Jeanne Jugan "Blessed," an important step on the path to canonization,



Photo by Jim Fackler

Jeanne Gatz, BA'60, and her husband, Edward Gatz, BS'61, M.D., Ph.D., above, are filled with gratitude to God for Gatz's miraculous healing. At right, Sr. Marguerite McCarthy of the Little Sisters of the Poor, Gatz and the late Rev. Richard McGloin, S.J., examine Blessed Jeanne Jugan prayer cards shortly after the Gatzes contacted the Little Sisters in 2002.

and said that her spirituality and apostolic message were timelier than ever.

Seven years later, a personal drama was unfolding for Omaha anesthesiologist Edward Gatz, BS'61, M.D., Ph.D., and his wife, Jeanne Gatz, BA'60. Edward was told he had cancer, a large adenocarcinoma in his esophagus that extended into his stomach.

Mrs. Gatz called the couple's friend and confidant and Mrs. Gatz's former Latin teacher, Fr. McGloin, with the devastating news.

"When I told Fr. McGloin that Ed had cancer and had six months to a year to live," she related, "He replied, 'Well, the doctors haven't heard of Jeanne Jugan.'"

Fr. McGloin explained that she was the foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor. "He had talked about the Little Sisters over the years, telling stories of when he was their chaplain in Milwaukee. He had the greatest respect and admiration for them and said they were the most wonderful group of women he had ever met.

"He said, 'We're going to ask her to intercede for Ed's cure. We must do this every day without fail.' I said, 'Fine, Father, I will pray with you.'"

Fr. McGloin did not know at the time that the foundress had been beatified, meaning that proof of a miraculous cure through her intercession was needed before she could be recognized as a canonized saint of the Catholic Church.

So Fr. McGloin and Mrs. Gatz began praying. Her husband, meanwhile, did not pray the novena prayer for a cure, and had accepted his fate at age 51. "I attempted to say the novena myself on a couple of occasions but there was almost a brick wall," he said.

"I never prayed to our Lord for a cure, didn't ask for a day or month or a year. I was just happy to have had six years longer than my mother had and 11 years longer than my dad ... and I had time to prepare for my 'final exam.'" Gatz said he felt he had received graces from the Anointing of the Sick that gave him a sense of peace and acceptance of his impending death.

Though there was no treatment, he was told he might be able to have a palliative surgical procedure to remove the fist-sized tumor. A cardiovascular-thoracic surgeon at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., completed the partial

esophago-gastrectomy, removing most of the esophagus and part of the stomach, pulling Gatz's stomach up into the chest area. The cancer had spread, also requiring removal of his vagus nerve.

He was told no one survives his type of cancer and that tumors would keep forming. He had the option of receiving radiation and/or chemotherapy, but was told neither would provide a cure or even



necessarily prolong his life, so he opted to forego those treatments.

(An interesting aside: Two years later, Mayo doctors did additional studies on Gatz's tumor and found that it was an aneuploid cell type. The Omaha physician who requested the study concluded that Gatz was "lucky" to still be alive. He commented that four months' survival would have been optimistic if the doctors had known the cell type was aneuploid.)

The Gatzes returned home and Ed began adjusting to his new diet and digestive problems. He had regular follow-up appointments and CAT scans to detect the cancer's return.

"Every checkup I had, I was prepared for the worst because I knew it should happen, and when it didn't, you don't dare hope because the reality was that there are no survivors," Gatz said.

Thirteen years later, he was still cancer-free. Everyone told him he was a walking miracle, and he knew it. Meanwhile, Mrs. Gatz and Fr. McGloin continued asking Blessed Jeanne Jugan to intercede daily. And every year, Ed's digestive abilities and overall wellness improved.

About this time, the Gatzes began to

think perhaps they should officially report the healing. They consulted Fr. McGloin, who agreed it would be a good idea. "But I had no idea where to turn," Mrs. Gatz said.

It happened that they were hosting two young women from a church group who were traveling through Omaha the day they had discussed the issue with Fr. McGloin. Mrs. Gatz mused aloud that she did not know who to contact with the Little Sisters of the Poor.

"One of our guests looked at me like I was crazy and said, 'Why, you should contact Sister Marguerite in Kansas City. We just stayed there last night. She's wonderful,' and handed me her phone number.

"We were just moved along by the Holy Spirit the whole way. I didn't even have to leave my kitchen to find out, and she was just the perfect person to contact. She was very efficient and kept everything moving."

So, in 2002, Sr. Marguerite McCarthy, who is now superior of the Little Sisters' San Pedro, Calif., home, got the unexpected call from Omaha that filled her and her fellow sisters with joy. She made several trips to Omaha to see the Gatzes and Fr. McGloin. In fact, she and a few other Little Sisters were praying with Fr. McGloin in his final hours in 2005.

"That call placed me on a path of great faith," Sr. McCarthy said. "From first learning of the novena to the final declaration of the miracle, I have witnessed God's divine power and the Holy Spirit's guidance along the way. God opened an avenue of opportunity that, with patience and persistence, has culminated in the recognition of our foundress as a saint."

Still, it took seven years from when Mrs. Gatz placed that call until this February, when Pope Benedict XVI announced that the humble French woman who established an international religious family dedicated to hospitality toward the needy elderly will officially be recognized as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church on Oct. 11, 2009.

Those years included Gatz compiling some 50 pages of his medical records, phone calls, interviews, investigations and lots of waiting while Vatican officials undertook the painstaking process.

"If Ed had taken the chemo or the

radiation, he would not have been considered for the cure or the miracle," Mrs. Gatz related, adding that other cases that claimed healing through Jeanne Jugan's intercession had been rejected because medical treatments were used. The Gatzes said one woman had received an almost instantaneous healing but had used other treatments as well.

"Most people have seen miracles in their lives and priests have seen miracles when they do anointings, but getting it through Rome is another thing," Gatz said.

"Many people have said that it was such a shame that Ed had to retire with all that education he had, but we see now that all that schooling was for a higher purpose," Mrs. Gatz said. "He had the

"Fr. McGloin was the pivotal person in all of this, though, of course, God was the prime mover. Fr. McGloin was a living saint. He was a humble Jesuit who was totally devoted to his work and his students. He was always accessible. His love and devotion to people were unmatched." – Jeanne Gatz

scientific background to explain to Rome and document all that had happened to him."

The Gatzes will be in Rome for the canonization and will carry a relic of Jeanne Jugan up to the altar at the Offertory of the Mass.

As they walk up the aisle, they undoubtedly will think of their Creighton friend. "Fr. McGloin was the pivotal person in all of this, though, of course, God was the prime mover," said Mrs. Gatz. "Fr. McGloin was a living saint. He was a humble Jesuit who was totally devoted to his work and his students. He was always accessible. His love and devotion to people were unmatched."