


DIOCESE OF PUEBLO
C O L O R A D O

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this age we need prayer! We need light! An amazing gift of prayer and light has been quietly burning in the Diocese of Pueblo for twenty-one years. Now we need to attend to it.

I write to bring to your attention the Franciscan Capuchin Poor Clare sisters living in our Diocese of Pueblo. This religious order has a unique history in the Catholic tradition. Inspired by the preaching of Saint Francis, Saint Clare of Assisi petitioned to join the Franciscan order at the age of 17. She assumed a life of monastic holiness and poverty and, with St Francis, founded a monastery for religious sisters in San Damiano in 1216. The Poor Clares' dedication to prayer and living in extreme poverty, that is, never to own property but to live upon the grace of God and local charity, is one of the strictest monastic rules of our tradition.

Bishop Arthur Tafoya invited the Poor Clare Sisters to Pueblo in the early 90's and ten years later they arrived. Grateful to receive temporary living space above a chapel for daily Mass, these first five sisters were promised more suitable housing soon. That was twenty-one years ago. Since then their daily life has been dedicated to prayer and the "customary work of our hands," embroidery and sewing, making liturgical vestments, in cramped quarters, worshipping in a small chapel cold to the bones in winter, and gardening and exercising in a meagre outdoor enclosure in a neighborhood has become unsafe. Mainly unknown and hidden away, the Poor Clares have cheerfully maintained their quiet status as the "prayer warriors" of the Pueblo Diocese for the past twenty-one years without complaint.

Over one year ago our five sisters were informed by the mother superior that they should prepare for transfer to other communities within the order. According to the rules of the order, at least eight sisters must be housed together for purposes of community. This rule was now to be enforced as canonically mandated by the Holy See. The present monastery was deemed unsuitable for any consideration of remaining in Pueblo.

Our five sisters unanimously petitioned their mother superior and me, as bishop, to be allowed to remain here. The order's provincial council agreed to wait to see if the diocese could come up with a way to house eight sisters for a permanent establishment of the Poor Clares in Pueblo. Outside of Colorado, more sisters began to express interest in relocating here.

The diocese proceeded to explore possibilities whether to redesignate and/or refurbish existing properties, or to invest in larger housing. The art and science of housing a cloistered order were thoroughly investigated. The sisters eagerly helped us to check the boxes as to what was needed. Our progress was inconclusive until Father Joseph Vigil, pastor of St Joseph parish in Blende, stepped forward. Hearing of our dilemma and loving our sisters, Father Joe consulted his parish finance council and offered to donate parish property for building a new monastery. To this purpose 1.75 acres of land contiguous to the parish, behind the soccer/softball field, has now been dedicated. One gift from heaven has now been given. Thank you St. Joseph!

The proposal and plan for the new monastery is beautiful. It will house eleven sisters, with a sacred chapel, ample indoor recreation and work areas, up-to-date kitchen, appliances and bathrooms, a visiting room and a small suite for the sisters' visiting families and officials from the order. (Our sisters have families in Mexico and the Philippines; we have now received applications from three new sisters from Mexico and Thailand.) There is to be an enclosed outdoor courtyard for prayer, meditation and exercise, with ample space for vegetable and flower gardens. God willing, this house of prayer can be expanded one day to house more sisters, if that is His design. This is important for them. It is even more important for us.

The new chapel will be open to the public for Mass, with the sisters' needs for cloistered separation accommodated within the worship space. This is not presently possible. This will offer the sisters a path to more young vocations to see and experience life as a cloistered Capuchion Poor Clare. Also to give the laity an opportunity to experience and participate in the Franciscan charism of prayer and devotion.

As I stated at the beginning, we need prayer! We need light! The amazing gift of prayer and light has been burning in Pueblo for these past twenty-one years. Our Poor Clares have prayed us through transitions, tragedies, suffering and sorrow even when we had no idea we were being prayed for. In their childlike storming of heaven they are powerful advocates for sinners such as we are. The world depends on them with words it cannot itself express, to pray for those who cannot or will not pray, for the universal, desperate need for God and his merciful intervention in our lives. Pueblo needs these prayers!

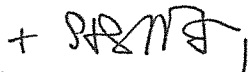
The next time you awaken at two in the morning, reflect on this: A Poor Clare sister is awake and praying for you before the Blessed Sacrament. One sister is taking her turn praying before the Blessed Sacrament in the Chapel, prayers constantly going up to heaven through night and day, 24/7. They will pray and meditate communally for six hours that day. Throughout the day their work becomes their prayer of praise and thanksgiving.

Our mission to proclaim Jesus to the world comes from this powerful spiritual energy. We have been given this witness. Now we need to attend to it.

As bishop, I pledge on behalf of the diocese the initial \$300,000 needed to build a new monastery. Donations of labor have been pledged by parishioners and local businesses to keep the construction costs down. Our overall goal to build and finish the new monastery is \$2,000,000. We have \$1,700,000 to go. God is with us. With God we can do this and we need your help. This is our active call to prayer for the future of our community and our world.

May we always be mindful of the gifts God has given us, and be generous in returning favors! In gratitude for your generosity and in trust in Our Lord's guidance, I remain your servant,

In Jesus and Mary,

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Most Rev. Stephen J. Berg
Bishop of Pueblo