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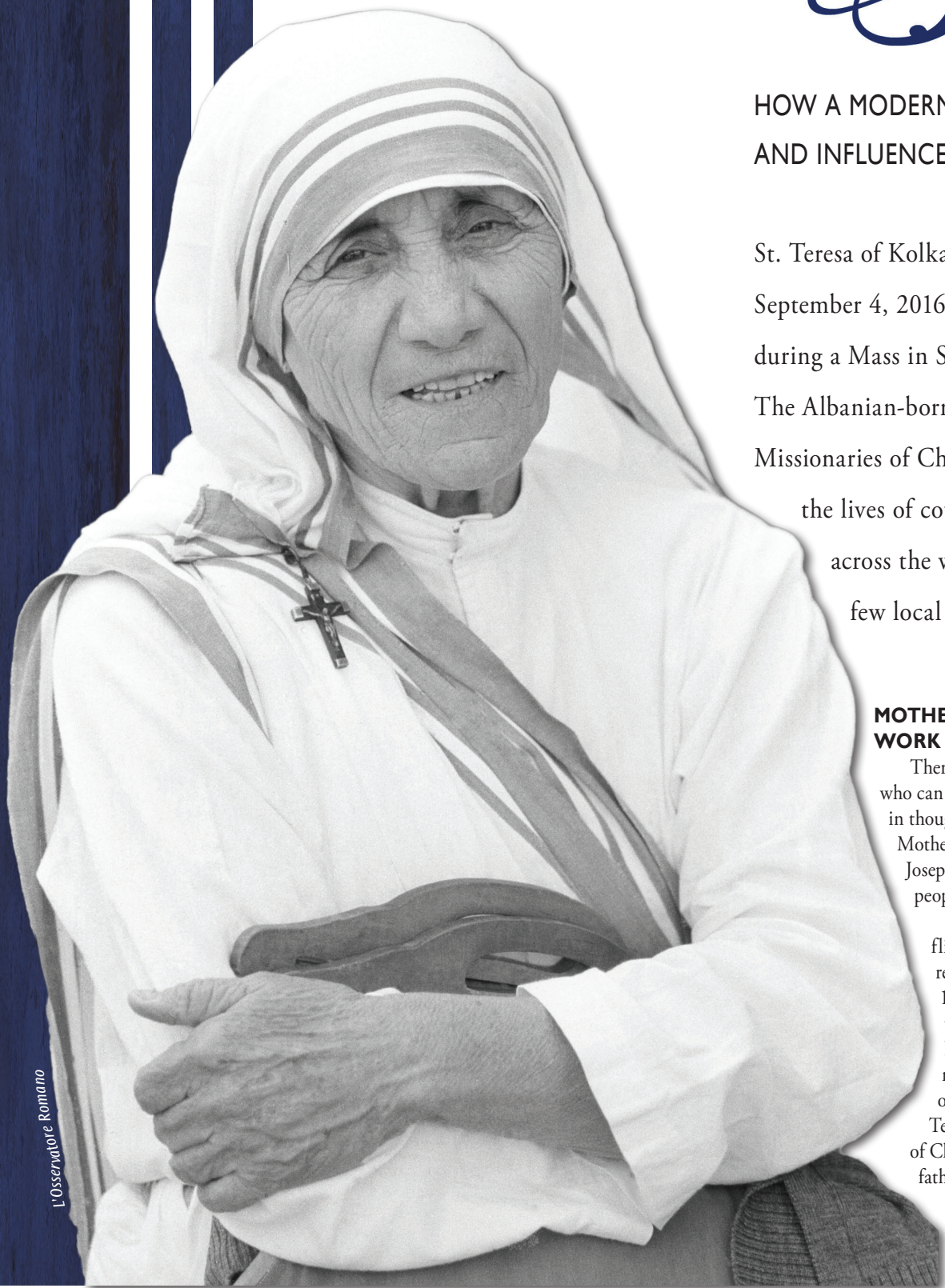
HOW A MODERN SAINT FROM HALFWAY AR
AND INFLUENCED THE PEOPLE OF THE DIO

St. Teresa of Kolkata was canonized September 4, 2016 by Pope Francis during a Mass in St. Peter's Square. The Albanian-born founder of the Missionaries of Charity influenced the lives of countless people across the world. Here are a few local stories.

MOTHER TERESA INSPIRES WORK WITH HOSPICE

There aren't too many people who can say they spent an hour in thoughtful conversation with Mother Teresa of Kolkata. Gini Joseph Kempen is one of those people.

The American Airlines flight attendant met the recently-canonized saint in 1995 during a family trip to India to visit relatives. Her aunt was an early member of the religious order started by Mother Teresa — the Missionaries of Charity — and Kempen's father simply picked up the



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WAY AROUND THE WORLD IMPACTED

By Joan Kurkowski-Gillen / Correspondent

HE DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH.

phone to arrange a meeting with the Nobel laureate and friend he's known and supported since the 1950s.

"She was so much shorter than I expected — a tiny, little thing," remembers Kempen, who was 26 at the time and wanted to meet the woman *Time Magazine* declared a "living saint" in 1975.

The airline worker attended morning Mass inside the convent's plain, pew-less chapel and recalls seeing the frail, 85-year-old missionary kneel on a hardwood floor, then help distribute Communion to worshippers in the hot, humid room. Benefactors frequently donated fans to the convent but sisters told the Joseph family Mother Teresa wouldn't accept the luxury, "as long as other people didn't have it."

The memory Kempen holds most dear is "those few hours I spent there with her sitting next to me on a bench, holding my hand and talking to me about what God wants us to do," she says. "It was a turning point in my spiritual life."

After witnessing poverty in the poorest area of Calcutta, now Kolkata, and learning about Mother Teresa's work with orphans and the dying, the young India-born American began reassessing her life. She became a hospice volunteer and trainer and later used those skills to care for an ailing mother-in-law who battled Alzheimer's disease.

Kempen, who still has a pendant and rosary given to her during the visit, never viewed Mother Teresa as mystical or otherworldly. The bond forged was more personal.

"I just knew her as a woman who inspired me and put me on a course that was my life's purpose," she insists. "She was a catalyst for the direction I took."

FORT WORTH VISIT EMPHASIZED "BATTLING POVERTY BEGINS IN THE HOME"

Mother Teresa's work with the poor and powerless was just beginning to attract worldwide attention when she came to Fort Worth in May 1976.

The humanitarian was in the United States to receive the *Pacem in Terris* Peace and Freedom Award from the Catholic Interracial Council and visiting several American cities was part of her itinerary.

Bob Walters was part of the crowd giving Mother Teresa a standing ovation as she took the Fort Worth Convention Center stage. The late Father Robert Wilson introduced the speaker and described her ministries for the awestruck audience.

"Her presence on stage was almost overwhelming," recounts Walters, a longtime admirer of the missionary who was eager to see her in person. "In addition to my strong emotions, I felt something physically sweep over me — like a breeze suddenly hitting the face or stepping out from the shadows into the sunlight. I knew in my heart I was in the presence of the saint."

Employed at the time as a research scientist in the local aerospace industry and the father of three young children, Walters wondered how he could meet his family obligations and still help Mother Teresa's work in India.

Speaking in a soft, muted voice, the would-be saint addressed his inner-conflict.

"What touched me the most was when she said, 'please do not come to Kolkata to help us with poverty. Work on the poverty in your own



St. Teresa of Kolkata, foundress of the Missionaries of Charity, is pictured with an unidentified woman during a 1976 visit to the U.S. (CNS photo/Robert S. Halvey)

home.' At the moment, I knew my job was to stay in my home and be the best father I could be to my three children," the St. Francis of Assisi parishioner revealed.

Today, Walters is a longtime advocate for the unborn and other respect life issues along with his wife, Angela, who is the diocesan Gabriel Project director.

"Mother Teresa had a special place in my heart especially after that evening in the Fort Worth Convention Center," he said. "I looked forward to the day when she would be officially declared a saint."

UNSTAMPED LETTER ANSWERED A PRAYER

Pat Pelletier still remembers the August day in 1985 when she opened her post office box to find an unstamped letter. Its arrival seemed almost providential.

Her husband, the late Chuck Pelletier, was sitting in a lawyer's office waiting to be deposed in a lawsuit that challenged his pro-life work in Tarrant County. The letter came from Mother Teresa who was responding to a note and newsletter sent a few weeks earlier by Pat regarding the couple's outreach to pregnant women in crisis.

It read:

Dear Pat, Thank you for your kind letter and newsletter. I'm glad and thank God for all the good and beautiful work you are all doing to help mothers in distress and care for helpless little ones. May God enlighten you so you may know how to help each person that comes to you and may He strengthen you in your difficulties. Keep the joy of being loved by God in your heart as your strength for He is faithful. God Bless You, Mother Teresa.



Mother Teresa with an ailing man in an undated photo. (CNS photo courtesy Catholic Press Photo)

"It was so very meaningful for us to receive [the letter] that day," Pat says, reflecting on the circumstances. "We were going through a very difficult time in our life and it gave us a sense of relief knowing we were doing the right thing."

The last sentence in the note written by Mother Teresa was the answer to a prayer for Chuck Pelletier, who passed away in January 2016 after decades of working to change people's hearts about abortion.

"Those words were

Witnesses to a saintly life

Interviews by Joan Kurkowski-Gillen



"Mother Teresa once typed me a little note that said: 'You will see the face of Christ in the poor.' We're all poor in some way — spiritually or materially. Because of her, I have not thought of success as having a lot of money. I see success as doing God's will."

— SUZETTE CHAIRES
PARISHIONER, ST. MARIA GORETTI



"I concelebrated the canonization Mass with the pope and found the whole ceremony very inspirational. When Pope Francis declared Mother Teresa a saint, tears fell from my eyes.... I had the opportunity to talk and be with Mother Teresa in India. We think of saints as living long ago or far away from us. Now, I feel there are saints in our neighbor who we talk with and are living among us."

— FATHER AUGUSTINE KOLAPURAM
PASTOR, ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA



"Mother Teresa of Kolkata played an important role in discerning my vocation. I read her book, *Total Surrender*, and it gave me the desire to give everything to God. I remember thinking of [her] and what God achieved through her order of Sisters. Knowing what God could do with a group of women — totally dedicated to Him — really helped me not to be afraid of where He was calling me... ultimately to religious life!"

— KIM BROWN
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF VOCATIONS

very special to him,” his wife said.

Over the years, the Pelletiers shared copies of the letter with others but kept the treasured original in a safe deposit box. It is now considered a third-class relic.

“We always felt like a little angel carried it and dropped it off in the box,” said Pat, who still wonders how the correspondence made its way from India to Texas without postage.

“I was just thrilled about the canonization. Watching Mother Teresa declared a saint during the Year of Mercy is so special because she was merciful to so many people.”

TRIP TO INDIA LEAVES LASTING IMPRESSION

Reading the *City of Angels*, a book by Dominique Lapierre about the unsung heroes working in the slums of Kolkata, changed — and almost ended — Father Jim O’Toole’s life.

After 21 years as an Air Force chaplain, the diocesan priest left military service and set his sights on traveling to India.

“I was inspired by the priest in the book and decided to go there,” remembers the now retired pastor. “The year was 1989 and Mother Teresa’s charities were going full blast.”

The enthusiastic volunteer lived with the Missionaries of Charity brothers and worked in the home for the dying.

“We would pick people up on the streets, take them to the home and wash, clean, and feed them,” Fr. O’Toole says, describing the care given without benefit of protective gloves or masks. “The home was a big open ward that was spotlessly clean. Beds were pulled aside and the floors were mopped with a solution that would burn your skin.”

Fr. O’Toole never met Mother Teresa. She left Kolkata the day he

arrived and returned three and half months later. By that time, the Texan was seriously ill with typhoid fever, hepatitis, and tuberculosis and was rushing home for treatment.

But, while celebrating Mass at the convent every morning and spending time at the leper colony, Fr. O’Toole came to understand the living saint through her fellow sisters and other colleagues. According to the people who knew her best, Mother Teresa was a tireless, dedicated, and stubborn soul.

“I was told that if she didn’t get her way, there were temper tantrums but it was always about something for the poor,” he explains. “When they wouldn’t give it to her, she would get upset.”

Fr. O’Toole remembers Mother Teresa’s worldwide headquarters as a 12’x12’ room with two manual typewriters and one telephone. The sparsely furnished office received thousands of dollars in donations a day and dispersed the money to missions around the world.

“Someone once advised her to put some of the money in a bank or invest it for interest but that never happened,” he says, sharing one of the many stories he heard. “She said, ‘God sent us the money He wants us to have today and He’ll send us that He wants us to have tomorrow.’”

It took Fr. O’Toole a year to recuperate from the near-deadly illnesses contracted in India but he doesn’t regret the experience.

“There’s no question the work those sisters and Mother Teresa did was monumental and heroic,” he suggests. “For me, it was the high point of my life. I haven’t found anything that was more satisfying.”



An undated file picture shows St. Teresa of Kolkata holding a child during a visit to Warsaw, Poland. (CNS photo/Tomasz Gzell, EPA)



Pope John Paul II holds hands with St. Teresa of Kolkata after visiting Mother Teresa’s home for the destitute and dying in 1986 in India. (CNS photo/Luciano Mellace, Reuters)