

EL PUENTE Hispanic Ministry Celebrates 20 Years of Devoted Service in Jefferson City, Missouri

MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE CELEBRATION INCLUDED AN ARTICLE IN THE NEWS TRIBUNE:

A bridge between cultures

El Puente celebrates 20 years with bilingual Mass

By Gerry Tritz
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A Catholic organization that ministers to Hispanics by helping them with earthly and heavenly needs celebrated two decades of service Sunday.

On Sunday, Bishop W. Shawn McKnight and former Bishop John Gaydos led a bilingual Mass at St. Peter Church for El Puente. A reception followed at the Selinger Center next door.

Three Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word formed El Puente in late 1999: Sisters Peggy Bonnot and Marianne Kramer, both with Jefferson City ties, and Sister Margaret Snyder, of Kirksville.

Bonnot and Snyder, the two surviving founders, attended the Sunday ceremony, which also celebrated the 150th anniversary of Sister of Charity of the Incarnate Word.

"We really weren't sure where the Hispanics were" in the late 1990s, Snyder said at a reception after the Mass. "We thought maybe we would have to go stand outside Walmart to find some of them and begin the ministry."

She said they started helping a few families who led them to more.

"It was very small at one point, but look at us now. It's wonderful," Snyder said.

Bonnot said Hispanics would come to the organization for various needs, such as pregnant women seeking medical care.

Snyder also credited the now-retired Monsignor Don Lammers for helping the organization at the start.



Gerry Tritz/News Tribune

Jefferson City resident Hector Guillen performs a matachines dance as he leads the way to a reception for the 20th anniversary celebration for Hispanic ministry El Puente.

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It would require a simple majority to pass.

Due to new people joining the Osage County Commission and the county clerk's office, the ballot proposal did not make it onto the August ballot as originally planned, Bonham said.

He estimated the tax would generate \$500,000-\$600,000 a year.

Osage County already has a law enforcement sales tax, but the majority of that money goes to fund the 911 Center, Bonham said. This tax, if passed, would be used for wages and equipment for Osage County Law Enforcement. Currently, the county general revenue funds pay for the operation of the Sheriff's Department.

As it is in many small communities, Bonham said, trying to find qualified individuals to work for low pay is at the heart of the matter.

"Fortunately, at the Sheriff's Department, we have all eight positions filled in the patrol division, and we have five jailers on staff with only one opening," Bonham said.

That could change very quickly, though, he added.

"Our department, like most our size, is a stepping stone for people to move to bigger departments such as Cole County," he said. "It's happened in the past, and it will happen again."

The current starting pay for an Osage County deputy is \$25,500, and they can top out at \$30,000, Bonham said.

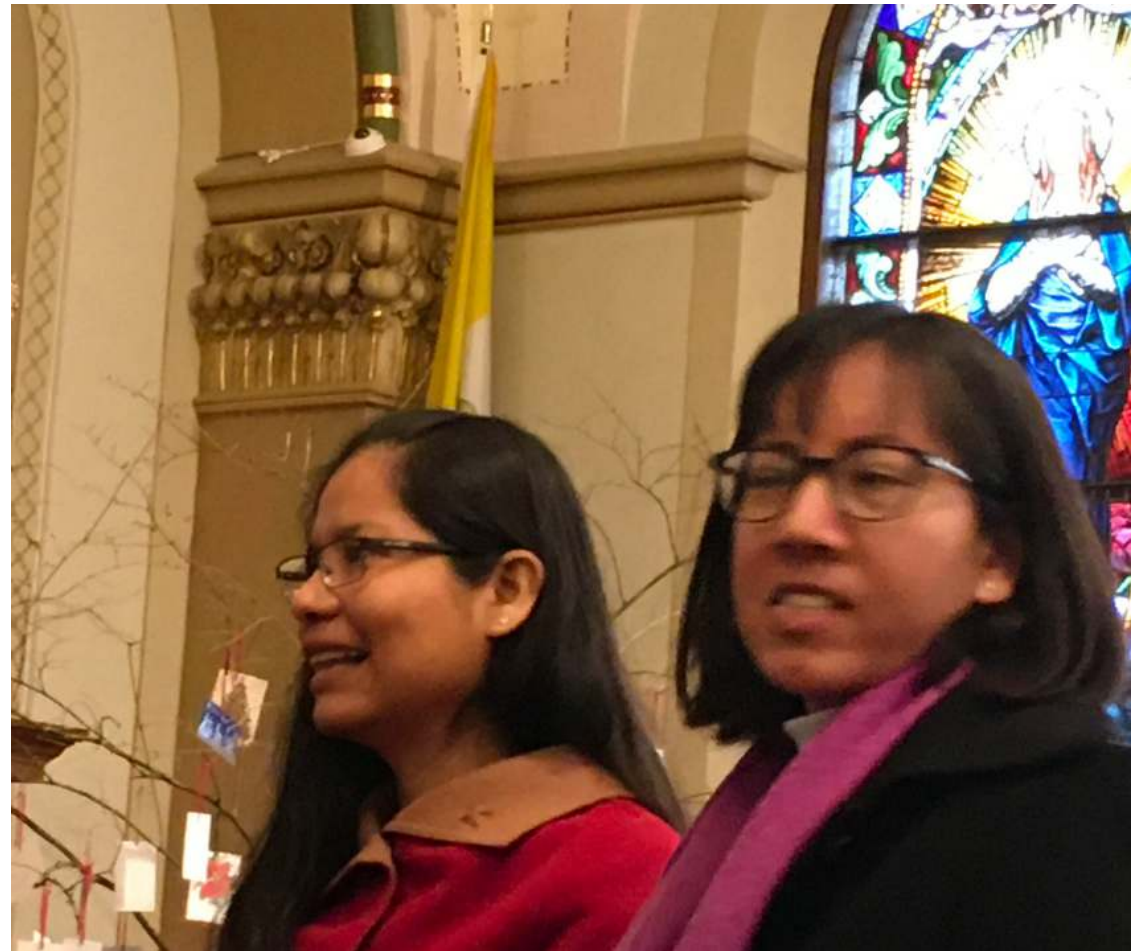
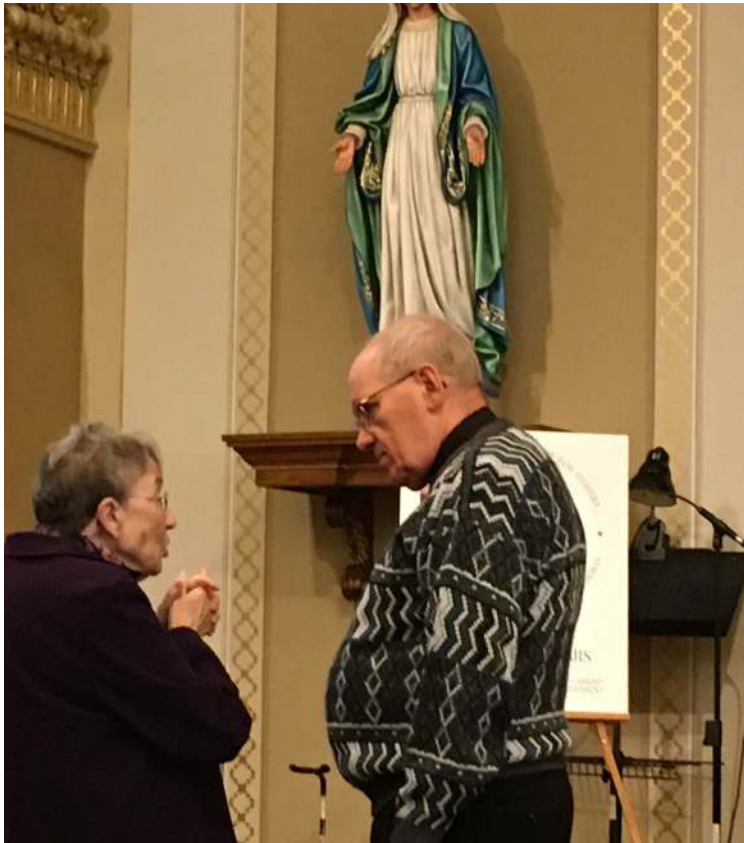
"Law enforcement right now is not sustainable, and that's a concern because there are simply not enough people coming into the profession right now to counter the ones who are leaving," he said. "If this passes, it would make us competitive. We can't pay as much as Cole County, but it would give us the ability to adequately pay for a county our size. It would also give some relief to the general revenue fund so more of those monies could help the 911 center."

If the tax is approved, starting pay for a deputy would be \$33,800 and top out at \$35,000. Starting pay for jailers would go from \$24,500 to \$28,000.

If the tax passes, Bonham said, he would like to put in place a system that would take into account years of service and a person's rank, which would also lead to salary increases.

"The money will also be used to upgrade our in-car computers so we can use GPS dispatching and get to people in our county with the fastest response times possible," Bonham said.

He said he has been making presentations to local civic groups to explain what the tax would be used for and why it is needed.



Sisters and Friends gather to celebrate a Bilingual Mass of Thanksgiving for the accomplishments of the El Puente Ministry in Jefferson City, Missouri.

Present Staff of the El Puente Ministry include: Cristhia Castro, Executive Director, Sister Guadalupe Ruiz, Sister Bertha Flores, Sister Ana Luisa Prieto, and Magdalena Neal.