

# SEASONED OBSERVER

## SO YOU KNOW ...



(CNS photo/Andrew Wallmeyer, Stillwater Gazette)

Alan and Raleane "Rae" Kupferschmidt sit in the living room of their home in Lake Elmo, Minn., Jan. 13. Rae, 66, was declared brain dead nearly a year ago after a massive cerebral hemorrhage. The definition of brain death has been debated at the Vatican and in Washington in recent months.

## Minnesota Woman Comes Back from 'Brain Death'

Don't talk to Raleane "Rae" Kupferschmidt about brain death.

The 66-year-old woman from Lake Elmo, Minn., was declared brain dead nearly a year ago after a massive cerebral hemorrhage. She was removed from a ventilator, following her wishes, and her family took her home to die.

But when Kupferschmidt began responding to family members, they rushed her back to the hospital, where she regained what her husband called "98 percent" of her earlier vigor.

In late September she experienced another health crisis and went into a coma. Although doctors were not as hasty to term it brain death this time, they offered little hope of her survival — a prediction she defied again in October.

"I keep thinking that (God) saved me a second time so I could inspire people and let them know they shouldn't give up, even when things look hopeless," she told the Stillwater (Minn.) *Gazette* in a Jan. 13 interview.

Kupferschmidt's interview took place the day after the President's Council on Bioethics issued "Controversies in the Determination of Death," a 144-page white paper on what the council prefers to call total brain failure.

The topic also has attracted a great deal of attention at the Vatican over the years. In 1985 and 1989, the Pontifical Academy of Science recognized brain death as "the true criterion for death."

Fifteen of the 18 members of the President's Council on Bioethics concluded that the neurological standard for defining death was ethically defensible and clinically valid.

The question of brain death is most relevant in relation to organ transplantation, where the current protocol demands that no organs be harvested until at least two and a half minutes have passed after brain death is declared. Using other standards diminishes the likelihood that most organs would remain suitable for use in transplants.

"Ultimately, the central ethical challenge for any transplantation protocol is to give the gift of life to one human being without taking life away from another," said Dr. Edmund D. Pellegrino, a former president of The Catholic University of America in Washington and former director of the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University, who chaired the president's council.

"Until reasonable doubts are resolved by some scientifically valid criterion, my advice for all transplant protocols would be to err on the side of life," he added.

The council plans to issue a separate document dealing with organ transplantation.

— By Nancy Frazier O'Brien, Catholic News Service

# From Little Things, Big Things Grow

## Volunteers Make the Difference

BY TONY CARTON  
For The Observer

**J**erry and Mardell Homb say they made a marriage encounter in 1978 and shortly thereafter began to present those encounters themselves. They continued for nearly six years while the process drew them into volunteering for more of the everyday activities normally administered to by parishioners.

"We're not really involved with many community or civic organizations," she said. "We would rather spend our time doing things for our parish."

They are members of St. Ann parish in Warren, one of the three parishes along scenic Stage Coach Trail in northwest Illinois administered by Father Max Striedl.

Mardell said she remembers reading that about 30 percent of the members of any given organization will actively volunteer.

"I think it is the same with a church family," she said. "When you are in a smaller church family like ours, if you take a third of say a hundred families, well that's really not a whole lot of people to do the work, and even though it may be on a smaller scale than the larger parishes, many of the same things have to be done."

### Finding a niche

She coordinates several committees and serves on the parish cemetery board. She said that board recently oversaw the renovation of the parish cemetery.

"We put in a lot of shrubs and a memorial garden," she said. "We took the old stations from the attic at St. Ann and installed them on the south paths at the cemetery."



(Observer photo by Tony Carton)

Jerry and Mardell Homb add a few items to update the February version of the St Ann Parish Respect Life bulletin board.

### 'Asking someone for help is a big part of getting things started'

— Mardell Homb, volunteer at St. Ann Parish in Warren

"Someone donated some money and we used it to install a statue of the risen Christ overlooking an altar and stones memorializing the unborn and the victims of violence," she continued.

"We restored the iron gates and fences and planted a row of arborvitae to form a sound barrier that would afford privacy and dignity to the services held there," she added. "We installed flag poles and keep them lighted from Memorial Day through November. The parish cemetery board did

a lot of work out there."

In addition to those responsibilities, they both distribute the Eucharist, and Jerry is an usher and serves on the parish council.

"The council meets quarterly and they represent the parish, so anything that Father Max wants done he runs by the council and we try to see those projects through to completion," he said.

"The church is struggling for money like

everywhere else so it is important to help with the little things," he said.

Jerry is a general contractor and with the help of a cadre of other volunteers, does many things that need doing around the church.

He listed the new signs posted at each of the three parishes, as well as installing cabinets, painting, and working to complete a long term plan to restore the original altar at St. Ann as examples of the small things volunteers do around the parish.

### Just ask

They agree that it is difficult to find new volunteers.

"I am the Respect Life coordinator for the parish," she said. "Part of (coordinating) is just being brave enough to ask someone to do something. Sometimes you do better if you ask someone to do something directly instead of just putting it out there and waiting to see if anyone will respond."

She said that once folks get involved they often find they actually enjoy volunteering.

"Asking someone for help is a big part of getting things started," she said. "It is important to follow up on people when they volunteer, too. If someone signs up for something and no one ever calls them they tend to just drift off and you don't hear from them again, but if someone can connect with their church family in offering something they really enjoy doing, then it builds."



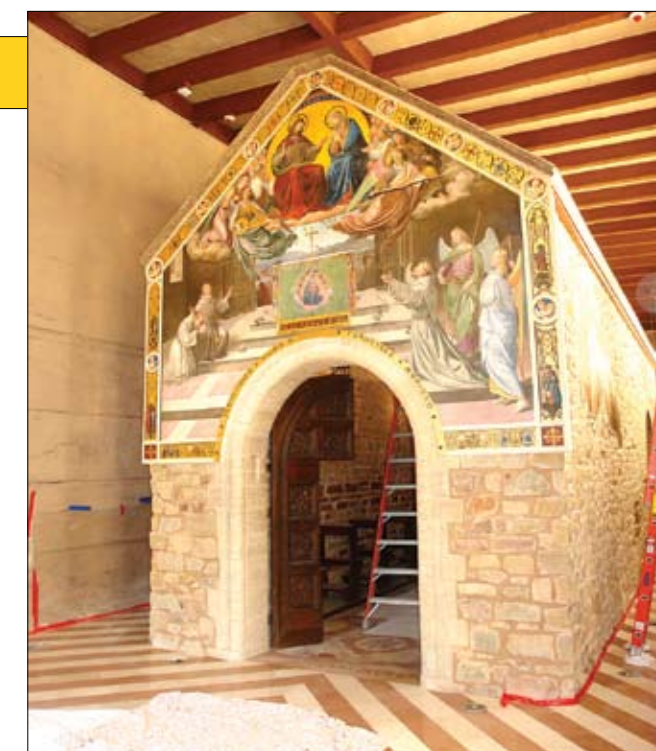
Sister Margaret Hunt rings a bell at the Dominican Monastery of Mary the Queen in Elmira, N.Y.

(CNS file photo/Mike Grupe)

these communities are integral to the entire life of the Catholic Church, in the United States and beyond," Mother Mary Clare said.

— By Chaz Muth, Catholic News Service

## DESTINATION



(CNS photo/Dan Morris-Young, Catholic San Francisco)

# National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi

**Destination:** The National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi was the first parish established in San Francisco, in 1849. The church, which was closed for a time after the 1989 earthquake, was declared a national shrine in 1999.

Masses at the shrine are held daily at 12:15 p.m. Monday through Saturday, there is an 11 a.m. rosary, noon Angelus, and 3 p.m. Chaplet of Divine Mercy. There is also Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament after Mass on Friday, and Benediction at 3:15 p.m.

**Why to go:** The shrine, which is "located in San Francisco's historic North Beach district, bears witness to Christ at the heart of the beautiful city named for the Poverello of Assisi," according to its Web site.

Although Father Junipero Serra had already established a mission at the spot that would become San Francisco, by the time of the California Gold Rush, it was serving mostly Spanish-speaking Catholics from Mexico and Spain. U.S. Army and Navy officials "appealed to the bishops in Hawaii and Oregon, and to the Archbishop of Baltimore. The bishop of Portland in Oregon sent two priests from the Pacific Northwest, and U.S. troops stationed at the Presidio built a small shanty to serve as a church," the Web site explains. The first Mass was held June 17, 1849.

Most recently, the church has opened a 78-percent scale, rock-for-rock, stone-for-stone, fresco-for-fresco replica of St. Francis of Assisi's tiny Porziuncola church near Assisi, Italy. A rare rock from Assisi, Italy (see photo on page 1), which was used more than 800 years ago when St. Francis and his followers built the church where the Franciscan order was born, was installed on the altar of the replica.

**Amenities:** The Franciscan Centre Gift Shop is open Tuesday through Saturday, 11 a.m. — 5 p.m.

**Access:** Visitors will find that busses stop within a block of the church, and there are several city parking lots within a six-block radius of the church. It is San Francisco, so parking is at a premium. And the church is near the financial district, so walking in the area is safe.

**(Grand) Kid friendly:** If yours is a family trip, children should behave as they would in any church.

**Info:** Address: 610 Vallejo St., San Francisco, CA 94133  
Phone: 415/983-0405. Web: www.shrinesf.org

— Compiled by Sharon Boehlefeld

We welcome your suggestions for 'Destinations.' If you have a photo, or just an idea, send it to "S.O. Destinations" at The Observer, 555 Colman Center Dr., P.O. Box, 7044, Rockford, IL 61125, or to observer@rockforddiocese.org.

## Vatican Orders Study of Women Religious in the United States

The Vatican wants to know why the numbers of women religious in the United States have decreased during the past 40 years.

Through a study, called an apostolic visitation, the Vatican also wants to look at the quality of life in the communities.

Sister Eva-Maria Ackerman, a member of the American province of the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George, will assist Mother Mary Clare Millea, a Connecticut native who is superior general of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, an international religious institute that has its headquarters in Rome, in the study.

Cardinal Franc Rode, prefect of the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated

Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, appointed Mother Mary Clare as the apostolic visitor.

The cardinal sent letters detailing the task to both the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious, the two major organizations representing heads of women's religious orders in the U.S.

It is too early to know how many volunteers will be enlisted to visit nearly 400 Catholic institutes for women religious in the U.S., how much it will cost or who will pay for the study, Sister Eva-Maria said.

"We hope to discover and share the vibrancy and purpose that continue to accomplish so

much, as well as to understand the obstacles and challenges that inhibit these individuals and institutions, thus limiting their growth and/or redirecting their resources and outreach," she said.

The study — which is expected to be completed by 2011 — is in no way connected to the apostolic visitation of more than 200 U.S. seminaries and formation houses in 2005 and 2006, which was ordered in response to the sexual abuse crisis that hit the U.S. church, Sister Eva-Maria said.

"I know that the object of this visitation is to encourage and strengthen apostolic communities of women religious, for the simple reason that